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PEASANT LIFE

BEING

SKETCHES OF THE VILLAGERS AND FIELD-LABOURERS IN GLENALDIE

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INTRODUCTION.

GLEN—— is a quiet valley, fertile and populous. It lies in ——shire, beyond the Tay. I purposely suppress the name, that its immunity from public attention may be preserved. Peaceful and unthought of by the great world beyond its boundaries, as it lay amid the hills, when, a child, I first knew it, so lies it now; and I see no good to follow from giving its name. Glenaldie will suit my purpose.

The valley is ten miles long from north-east to south-west, and its average breadth is about two miles. Its immediate boundaries are rising grounds of varying elevation, which, at some points of the northern boundary, start into the altitude of the hills, of which in reality they are only the advanced works. On that side the heights give views of a fine mountain range, stretching away to the north and west, not far distant, but still far away, over intervening miles of heath and peat-bag, of crag and ravine. To some parts of this mountain-landscape there is added the sombre green of the ancient fir-wood, lending a sort of funereal character to the scene, otherwise solemn in its quiet grandeur. The heights to

the south afford no such prospect. They look out on undulating wood and heath sloped off to the southward, with "the Braes of Langrig" in the south-west background. The flanking heights suddenly approximate at the north-east end of the glen, shooting out rugged spurs across the low ground, making the entrance to the valley both narrow and tortuous. These spurs are clothed with birch and hazel, and, at top, with pine. Indeed, all along the environing heights, clumps of wood are irregularly scattered, diversifying the aspect and colour of the scene. At certain seasons the colouring is gorgeous, and the valley seems bound with fringe of gold. That is in early May, when the gorse, with its resplendent flowers, lights miles on miles of the summits. At the south-west end of the valley the two chains of hills diverge more than before, and, then, they finally slope away to the south and west. There, where the ridges cease to present their definite outline, a range of hill is interjected from the west, terminating the strath at that end by a precipitous eminence of crag, 600 feet high, which takes its name from the valley, and is—I shall say—Benaldie. On it, also, the mountain-pines start spectre-like from crevices, and, clustered on its summit, crown it with clumps twisted and deformed. On each side of Benaldie flows or tumbles a stream from the hills beyond; now brawling brooks, now foaming, seething, torrents, as summer suns or winter tempests exhaust or swell them. Wandering in devious courses into the strath for a mile or two from Benaldie, they unite their waters,

and thereafter sweep on through the valley with the composure and importance of matrimonial life, until, reaching the north-east, the combined waters have to crush, and rush, and tumble, through the obstacles which there present themselves.

The valley, I have said, is fertile. Possibly at one time the whole strath was a great lake basin, before the waters found a way seawards to the north. This small fact remains, that in great floods, when rain on the hills sends down the streams "in spate," and the narrow outlet between the rocks is insufficient to drain off the increased waters, they swell thereabouts into a small lake, rendering the lands, for several hundred acres around, a marsh in winter. Here "the carses" in summer yield luxuriant pasture, which takes the browsing cattle deep to their hocks. But whatever may be the ancient secret of its fertile loam, numerous comfortable farm-steads bespeak the value of the soil, and assure us that, at least to the possessors of these steadings, the tilling of the earth is no unmitigated curse. These farm-steads, too, contribute in no small degree to diversify the valley's beauty. Here, with bulky if not ornate architecture, crowning a grassy knoll on the river bank; there, peeping from a clump of orchard-trees; at every short interval sending up the flaky, curling smoke from comfortable hearths, among the ash-trees, into the clear blue sky, they break the agricultural monotony of field and fence.

An enterprising and independent body of men are

the farmers—or tacksmen, as they are pleased to style themselves, methodical, careful, and, as a class, hard of head, and heart, and hand. Rents are high, and rigid thrift of management is necessary for the maintenance of that moderate "state and style," which the greater ones affect, or for the filling of kitchen, and larder, and purse, which the larger number reasonably set for their object. They are intelligent, but not intellectual; acute as to the relative values of manures and seeds; but insensitive to the pungent odours, seeds of disease, which steam in the bothies of their "horsemen;" keenly alive to the improvement of the bone and muscle of the animals they rear and sell; little regardful of the amelioration of the peasants whose lives are spent in tending and feeding the fostered "stock." Good-hearted and well-disposed, they are entitled to be accounted; but, still, they regard any increase of wages to their labourers, or any fall of price of produce, with a very selfish horror,—a class highly to be commended withal.

A great road from the north runs through the valley, entering by the pass through which the river finds its outlet. A mile from the base of Benaldie it branches into two roads, which run in distant windings, one southwards, into and through the parish of Langrig, the other westward through the solitary hills. Immediately north-east of where these roads separate stands the village of Glenaldie, commonly known as "Kirktown of Glenaldie." It occupies a sunny plateau on the

northern side of the strath, widest here, just where the hills die away, and the valley expands southward to Langrig and opens out above Benaldie to the western hills. The village is essentially a peasant village, uncontaminated by railway or telegraph. It contains about 700 souls. "The larachs," or building-stances, stretch along the road in prolonged disorder, for no feuing plan regulated the early years of the village. Irregularity of architecture and position is consequently the leading feature of its buildings. Here a thatch-roofed cottage abuts on the line of road, there a clay-built bothy presents its soot-permeated gable to the passer-by. A few better and more comfortable houses there are, built a short way back from the street or road, rendered pleasant to look at by a few shrubs or trees in the space in front. This better class of dwellings is now, however, chiefly to be found at the east end of the village, in that modern part thereof—"the Square." Here are the inn, the shop of the principal merchant, the residence of the doctor, my good friend Blake, and of others, the principal inhabitants. Portions of the sites in the Square are still unbuilt on. The straggling street stretches westward from it; while parallel to the street and to the north of it, stands a line of very humble cottages in all stages of progressive decay. The very poor ones of the people dwell there. It is "the Back Street." Just where the roads diverge, and on the south side of the main road, is the site of my cottage, but it is of little

interest for the present. A hundred yards westward from it, and to the north of the western road, stands the Kirkhill, on which the parish school is situated, and a little further west are the Church and Manse of Glenaldie. Down by the foot of the Kirkhill, a tiny, brawling brooklet tumbles. Crossing the road by a conduit, it flows eastward in front of my cottage grounds, and onwards for some way along the road, till, bending southward into the valley, it is caught in the mill-dam, which works Glenaldie Mill a quarter of a mile further down.

I know every man, woman, and child of the village; and it is in them, and not in the village or valley, that I wish to interest you. Have they any special points of interest? I am not aware of it. I believe them to be of the ordinary sort of Scottish villagers, neither better nor worse.

How little is known of these lowly ones! The reading world at least knows our peasants very remotely. Indeed, since the truth is that the kindest-hearted of us have but little knowledge of the liveried or well-dressed domestics whom we see hourly, how can it be expected that we should have an intimate knowledge of the ungainly and soil-daubed labourers in provincial fields, or any sympathy for their joys or sorrows or lives? When our writers treat of humble life in cities, it appears that they mostly know not what they describe. Commonly it is caricature—"High life below stairs." Yet sometimes a

great writer condescends to give to the world genuine specimens of the world's humble ones, and then the world is or ought to be the better for it. I am little skilled in writing, and am unknown; but I desire to elicit your sympathies for our peasants, by picturing their lives as I know them. The working man of our cities has ample attention. I think he has been too much made of. I entreat attention for a class whose mute endurance and patient suffering and toil, from age to age, are sufficient guarantees that humane consideration and ample sympathy for them will involve small risk of spoiling either their heads or hearts.

And that the pictures of peasant life which follow may be understood, it is reasonable that I should here sketch briefly the usual life of the mass of the peasantry; and, to do so methodically, I must take a peasant in babyhood, thus to begin at the beginning. I need not tell you that, like his congeners, he is then helpless and puling, needing the same daily ablutions and long sleeps. He does not, however, die off in infancy at the same rate as the young ones in our cities. I will not positively say from what this arises. His mother is not usually a tender-handed female. His father has seldom much time or heart to bestow on "the bairn." Yet that the infants of the rural population perish in less numbers than those in towns appears well established. Even with regard to "natural children" the same rule appears to hold good; and the intelligent Registrar of Glenaldie parish has remarked to me, "Thae weans live as lang at least as

the Sherra's decree" (for their maintenance). Probably this greater immunity from death in infancy results from the superior physical condition of the parents, and from the amount of fresh air which the infant inhales. The treatment which the baby receives is, if not tender, generally fair. In summer and harvest a nursing mother is not seldom found in the turnip or harvest field, earning her daily bread, while her infant lies at "the head-rig" snugly enveloped in numerous petticoats. Gazing on such a bundle, kicking lustily in vain effort to develop itself and burst into the sunshine, I have thought that, compared with the infant of the slums and cellars of cities, our poor babe had a great advantage, sucking or squalling in pure invigorating air; gazing, when it can gaze, on green field and blue sky; always secure of reasonable care; for our young women very rarely taste drink, and I never knew one addicted to it. The infants are weaned in the twelfth month generally. Then the daily washings are discontinued, and God knows when the creature is wholly cleansed thereafter.

The child's home is not a dwelling to be commended. When built of stone it is circumscribed of area, slimly constructed, and rarely plastered within. If it contains a "but and a ben," that is, a room on each side of "the trance," or lobby, it is a superior fabric; and the people are reckoned "well-to-do," who have both rooms, small as they are. In such a house the parents usually sleep in the "ben" room, while the younger people are huddled together "but," in the

kitchen or family room. Other houses consist of "a but and a ben," each room partitioned so as to form a room and closet; and then each room and closet are occupied by a separate family. Such are the dwelling-places of married farm-servants on our best farms—such the abodes of many decent village families. But many, too many, of the cottages have only a few layers of stones bound with clay, as the foundation of the walls, the upper portion of which are wholly of divots (sods), except the chimney-stalk in the gable. In Langrig, where there are a great many crofters, a still humbler style of cottage obtains. There the dwelling-house, byre, stable, and barn, are all contained in one long low erection of divots. The dwelling-house is, of course, at one end, and is divided into apartments by wooden box-beds and similar bulky articles of furniture. There is no chimney-stalk at all, no stone work, the whole edifice is of sods. In the innermost apartment, in the centre of the floor, on stone slabs, the fire is lighted. A large iron hook (not unfrequently part of the worn-out tyre of a cart-wheel is used for the purpose) is stuck into the earthen floor, or a rope with iron hook is hung from the rafters, and supplies a means to suspend a pot. For the escape of the smoke a gap is left in the roof; but usually the smoke appears persistently to object to egress thereby. Indeed, to secure the most defective ventilation, the entrance-door is placed in the distant byre, there being no doorway into the dwelling-house proper. Thus, the visitor is first introduced into the

odorous abode of the "neat" cattle, and thence gropes his way through the barricaded beds and furniture into "the fire-room," the sitting-room of the cotter family. Of course, there is no interior plaster-work, no ceiling, and the oozy, cobwebbed, smoke-begrimed thatch stares through the rude and blackened rafters. The only light comes from a scrimp pane of glass stuck here and there into holes in the sod walls or roof. The comforts of the hearth are commonly contested, in unequal strife, by children, young pigs, dogs, and barn-fowl, which all seem equally sensible of the pleasures of the peat fire.

How can people practise cleanliness in homes like these? Warmth may be, and generally is secured. Cleanliness is out of the question. It would astonish our dwellers in city palaces, and other high places, to learn how numerous are cottages, hovels, of the class last described. In them the inhabitants have made no advance on the civilisation of three hundred years ago, unless it be that the beds are now commonly of chaff instead of moss or heath. Will our lairds and lords of the soil do nothing to help progress?

In such habitations our peasant children are reared. It is certain that it needs a great deal of the fresh air on field and hillside to counteract the reeky atmosphere of the home. But there, nurtured along with the calves and swine, and junior colley dogs, the child grows slowly into boyhood. When five or six years old, if within three miles, or other reasonable distance of a school, to school he is sent. If the school is further away, he must wait

till older. Then to school he trudges by devious ways, cart-track, or "moss-road," or how he may, with his "piece" in his pocket, his book, his slate, when he comes to use one, and, every day, from 1st October till 15th April, a peat under his arm. The peat is his daily contribution of fuel to the school fire. Books may be left at home, slates forgotten, the "piece" omitted—the peat never.

Now, as soon as the A B C is mastered, the storing of religious knowledge is commenced through that least heavenly of all roads to knowledge—the Shorter Catechism. The Testament, and next "the Bible," are regular class-books—the Old Testament being usually read in the most advanced class in "side schools." Hitherto the child has, morning and night, listened wearily to his parents (if he is the child of a crofter—if the child of a farm-servant, the parents seldom have time for such exercises) reading "the books" and at prayer, comprehending the meaning not at all. Now, the meaning is thrashed into him; and, indeed, it is not easy for such meaning to get there. Not that I take exception to the Shorter Catechism in itself. It contains an admirable code of divinity, all duly verified by "proofs," expected also to be committed to the infant heart. But why bother a poor peasant boy with a complete and terrible and unnecessary system of divinity? It makes him regard religious knowledge as disagreeable exceedingly, the hardest and most perverse of studies, the prelude to chastisement,

temporal now, with the "tawse"—eternal hereafter. For at the very threshold of the knowledge thus inculcated come "the decrees of God," from which there is no escape. I speak on this point feelingly. Long ago, in my boyhood—about six years old I was—I remember that I lay down in the cradle of my infant sister, and secretly and silently wept for hours because of these same decrees. As painful hours they were, and now as keenly impressed on me, as any hours of a long and not painless life. I had newly learned the doctrine, and understood that I might be designed for everlasting burning, and that I could not help myself. On the peasant mind the doctrine is firmly impressed, and abides for life, hushing murmurs against the hard things of the peasant's lot, even much natural murmuring against the evil results of the misdeeds of those around him as "ordaint o' the Lord's wull;" nay, even stifling right reason in his own actings, and penitence for wrong-doings, as "things he cudna wun past."

Cannot something less complex and perplexing than this catechism be devised to help our peasant boy to know God? I think there might be. Of this I am satisfied, that if one-fifth part of the drilling and whipping were employed to instil into his mind the common principles of God's law of health and happiness, much more good would come of it.

The peasant schoolboy is rarely a bad little man. He is free from the leading vices of boys in cities. He may be as poor and hungry, as tattered and forlorn, as

the veriest city Arab; but he does not steal—unless, mayhap, a turnip from the field to eat it. The love of license, which in town boys is so often exhibited in petty acts of mischief and depredation, is in him sufficiently vented in long pursuit of the hated yellow-hammer, which, he oddly believes, is or was a witch; or by assaults (wanton) on a rookery, or (daring) on a wasp's nest. The incidents of his life are so little complex that he has small need of refuges of lies. Already the qualities which mark him in manhood distinguish him — patience under cold, or pain, or punishment; caution and love of peace; and that "solid-headedness" which is hard to move to emotion of any sort. Thus his ninth or tenth year finds him fit "to do a little for himself;" and then, if the parents are poor, he leaves the school in spring, and goes off to "summer herding." He may return to school thereafter for "a winter or two;" but, too commonly, he has acquired all that he is destined to acquire, and at once enters on his life of labour.

If the parents are able to maintain their child without prematurely sending him to earn his own food (and this, to their credit, they strive to do), the boy remains at school till the age of twelve or thirteen—in such case really acquiring a smattering of the ordinary branches of education. The education of the female child is, however, far more desultory. She rarely advances beyond "the Bible class." To write her name, and perhaps, a few words more; to cipher the simple rules

of arithmetic; to slowly spell a verse or two of "the Testament"—comprise all her educational acquirements. She is too useful at home, setting the mother free for a day's labour, helping in the "redding" of home and byre, to be long spared at school. Indeed the peasants, as a body, regard education as unnecessary, if not prejudicial, to their females. I am glad to notice that, of late years, a great improvement on the old system has been begun, and that the "higher" classes, both boys and girls, in parochial and village schools, are taught something of composition, and to write to dictation. In these schools, government inspection has effected much improvement. When will a paternal government stretch its hand over the distant hill-sides?

It is singular, that, notwithstanding the inferiority of the schoolmasters in districts like this, and the difficulties in the path of the peasants, both parents and children, here and there a boy emerges from school, betakes himself to studies in lonely barn or outhouse, building on the loose foundation of knowledge lined off for him at school. Stranger still, almost self-taught, he sets off to college, and, if he succeeds in winning a bursary at the college competitions, pursues his success until he reaches the haven of a rural manse. Those who thus make their way are generally sensible men. I have seldom found them distinguished or distinguishable from their brethren in the ministry. Perhaps, such careers are just an outcome of a real spring of enterprise and power to dare and do, common to the people generally. If so, then,

in the ordinary peasant such spring and power are crushed and broken utterly. How can it be otherwise? Restricted to a narrow field, and bound to labour on it for daily bread, he has as little practical power of motion as an encrinus. Still, I think the spring is in his nature. Break the ties that bind him to his spot of earth, evict and rout him out and drive him upon the world and his resources, and the chances are that there is that within him which will make the change, which his nature shrinks from as an evil, wholly and greatly good.

But to return to our peasant: once he is fairly bound to the yoke, his toil is unremitting. In all seasons and weathers there is labour for him, until death makes labour needless, or disease or accident disables him and brings want, worse than death, to his door. It is a very fine thing for poets to sing of the pleasure and happiness of a rural life. With them our peasant seems a being wrapt, from dewy morn till vesper's glorious tints, in the enjoyment of simple but admirable delights. I wish there had been less singing and more sense in reference to our peasantry. Just consider our ploughman's summer-day life—at turnip-sowing, we shall say. Aroused from his bed at five o'clock (dewy morn, truly!) he proceeds to feed his horses, and thereafter to groom and harness them. From six till eleven he holds the plough-stilts, and guides his team. Then he houses and feeds his beasts again. Till now he has gone unfed himself, unless in haste he swallowed a bit of dry bread while throwing on his clothes, or, more usually, supped a few

spoonfuls of meal-brose. Now, at mid-day, he makes a meal of porridge and milk and bread and milk, and then goes out to discharge various little duties till one, when he re-yokes his plough and labours till six. Then he has dinner or supper, or whatever he may call his meal—brose and potatoes and bread and milk again, and lights his pipe for a quiet smoke. But not for long, for the horses have to be groomed and bedded and fed, the harness looked to, and, perhaps, a plough sock or coulter carried to the blacksmith for repair, before his day is ended. I do not say the work is severe, but it is monotonous, stupefying, slow, and lowly.

In labour like that the peasant toils to manhood through the various stages of herd, halfling—half-man, that is—lad, and ploughman. Physically he is easily described. The average rustic is above the average size, strong in proportion, with considerable power of endurance. Vicissitudes of weather seem to affect him little. Pain he often bears without flinching. But when fever besets him, he succumbs without power to rally. Probably his diet, almost wholly vegetable, unfits him to withstand typhus, scarlatina, and fevers generally. Be that as it may, certain it is that from year's end to year's end his food is meal of oats, or of bere or barley, prepared in porridge or brose or cakes; potatoes; a few turnips now and again; and milk stintingly supplied to him. He is easily satisfied with food, and but little or not at all particular about its quality or preparation. He has no

daily draught of beer, and is rarely addicted to drink. If at village or market he happens to take or to get "a bad dram," it is apt to get into his head; but he carries himself and his liquor in good-humour and peaceably, "letting off steam" by yells or shoutings or songs. In truth he is a peaceable animal. In a dull, heavy way, he is social too; affecting much, in youth, the society of his females, and, at least, decency in his attire, with a tendency to favour gorgeous colours. He is not nice in his sense of smell, nor in regard to personal cleanliness, which are, however, matters of cultivation. He rarely, during his six working days, washes hands or face until supper-time comes round. On Sunday, he washes face and neck and hands, usually before breakfast. His body never is purified. That story is altogether true which is told of the old man attacked by rheumatism "between the shoulders." The laird's wife having recommended frequent applications of cold water, he thanked God, that "cauld watter wusna on his back for forty year bygane." Thus, while careful of external appearances, only the outside of his platter is made clean—just so much as the world sees. Skins and homes are not much for the public. Who shall teach our people the sanctifying merits of water? Would they be better if taught it? Is a clean skin compatible with the grubbing of earth and manure?

Mentally, he is also easy to describe. He is slow of mind as of body; not studious of new things; and,

indeed, as he advances in life, he clings to things as they are with peculiar tenacity. He is reticent of his feelings, and seldom states an opinion; perhaps he rarely forms one. Inoffensive himself, he is patient of injury. Decorous in his deportment in the sight of men, reasonably attentive to churchgoing, he developes in time into a religious man, greatly God-fearing. On the other hand, when his quiet nature is sufficiently disturbed and he is "roused," he is insensate in his wrath. Notwithstanding, too, all the good qualities ascribed to him, his religious pretences and his fear of God, he is undeniably, in his youth, open to the reproach of the registrar-general for contravention of that commandment, the breach of which, next to murder, induces the greatest amount of social sorrow and wrong. I do not mean to insinuate that he is, in this particular, a sinner above other men, but only that his sins suffice to disgrace him. It is his great blemish, but, perhaps, it is the chief blemish of mankind. It is due primarily, no doubt, to a superior physique; but his social circumstances, and some other things, contribute to the result with equal certainty.

Being constitutionally reserved and shy, when "he does a-wooing go" he prefers to woo privily, and manifests odd susceptibility if his secret is spoken of. The limited accommodation of the peasant cottages—large families occupying small rooms—favours the idiosyncrasy of the peasant sweethearts; and hence it is the accustomed course that most of the wooing is done out of doors, in

the shelter of the peat-stack or cornyard, or in barn or byre, outwith the sight of parents or friends, and in darkness. Indeed, this has come to be regarded as the privilege of true courtship, and "ingle-love" is purely platonic. To this practical facility for undue familiarity much of the evil I allude to is referable. It is a snare to the peasant—male and female.

Again, consider the case of the peasant "bothy girl." Four or five unmarried ploughmen (here we call them "horsemen") live in an out-house—some detached portion of a barn or stable at the steading. The room is barely furnished. A deal table, two or three wooden forms or "settles," two or three large "brown dishes," and a mug a-piece for the men, with a bowl or two extra, complete the inventory of furniture. The men sleep in beds fixed in two tiers along the back wall. Their wooden chests are ranged along the other walls. Such is the bothy. In this room, away from female superintendence or control, "the bothy girl" mends (makes up) the beds, cooks the men's porridge and brose, and bakes cakes for them, fetching in their milk from the dairy-woman, and generally ministering to them. Her hours, not thus occupied, are spent at labour in the fields. Thus, thrown into the society of rough men—all very excellent lads, no doubt, but all of them possessing, more or less, the peasant's affection for female society, with that courtship-privilege of the stackyard in the background, young in years, untaught to fence herself against rudeness or familiarity, much less from loving blandishment—what

hope of safety can you form for her? True, she has her nominal residence in "the female bothy," a similar room occupied by the unmarried female workers on the farm. That is but a frail fence. These girls share her peril, to a large extent, without succouring her at all; and one bad girl in such a bothy may work the direst evil. My wonder is that the tale of shame and sorrow is not greatly worse.

To some extent, too, our Scottish marriage laws, or the peasants' hazy notions of them (they perplex the College of Justice itself), operate to augment the evil. It is a common apology of the unfortunate female, "I thocht it was richt atween us. He promist me mairridge"—an apology generally accepted. In fact, so ordinary a thing is it to find one lapsed daughter in each peasant household, that the peasants generally have lost that fine moral sense which in better society makes the fallen woman an outcast and despised. I hold Mother Kirk, too, answerable for much of the evil state of things.

I speak with all reverence of the churches and clergy of the present. Am I safe in reflecting on their predecessors? The fact was that, a hundred years ago, offences against chastity were punished by the kirk-session of the parish by a pecuniary fine, and by the imposition of a public penance, whereby the parties, "standing in the face of the congregation," were rebuked for their misdeeds. The civil law might be used to compel the submission of a recusant. But such penance

undergone and the fine duly paid, the offenders were received into the bosom of the Church again, and baptism was administered to their bantlings as to the children of "believers!" Then, when a laird or other magnate fell into sin, and acknowledged it by sending the usual amount of money-penalty to the session, with "his compliments," or some such indifferent message, the reverend court was satisfied. Can it be wondered at that an offence which the Church for a century held as venial and so easily condoned, came to be considered by the people as little offensive to God himself? And when the peasant mind became imbued with this idea, so acceptable to the common temperament, ages were required to eradicate the mischievous belief; and the time requisite has not yet elapsed. Could not the clergy of to-day speak a little less to our peasantry of doctrines, and more of the practice of religion—a little more and more plainly of that cleanliness of person and life, which is akin to godliness? An annual sermon against stackyard courtship would be a good thing, worth many platitudes on "faith and grace."

But our peasants are essentially orderly, and whatever may be the errors of youth, they are married and given in marriage; and, not unfrequently, reparation by marriage covers a multitude of prior transgressions. Then, indeed, when children come, the peasant is truly *adstrictus glebæ*, his life and horizon bounded by the land he tills, save by his views of a world to come, where labour is unknown and joy abounds.

Meantime, just as his lowly plodding work and exposure to the weather stiffen his joints, making him awkward and lumpish, so its dull routine stupefies his wits and depresses his intellect. The whole literature within his reach consists of the Bible, the Catechism aforesaid, the "Pilgrim's Progress," and, perhaps, "the Confession of Faith," and "Boston's Fourfold State." All these are commonly to be found in the cottages. Not that the peasant reads them, excepting the Bible and the Pilgrim. Over the others he usually falls asleep on Sunday afternoons, showing at once his orthodoxy and good sense. A newspaper he seldom sees, but I am sorry to say that that vile style of cheap literature, of which "Reynolds's Penny Journal" is the type, has recently found its way into our strath, and, I fear, will not tend to edification.

Our peasant's ordinary mental food are the weekly sermons, and, as life advances, he readily yields himself to them. Indeed, his early religious exercises have haunted and weighed on him all through his earlier years, making him fear to do evil, and desire to do well. He would fain be as his fathers were; and gradually he becomes studious of the ordinances of religion. He ends a God-fearing man, I am afraid too much God-fearful, mouthing doctrines and mysteries, and rigidly enforcing the Bible and Catechism on his offspring, as was done unto him in boyhood. In all this he has a certain satisfaction and solace. If it cannot

truly be said that "He *knows* his Bible true," he *believes* it, which, perhaps, is better.

And it is reasonable and well that he should lay up treasure in heaven, seeing that his portion of this world's goods is but small. Ten or twelve pounds of money-wage, eight bolls of oatmeal, a limited supply of peats, a daily pint of skimmed milk, two or three drills of potatoes, of which, good or bad "he takes his chance," and his cot rent-free, are the full guerdon of his year of labour. If his place of labour is within walking distance of the village, and he rents a cottage and resides there, he receives a pound or two more of wages. If accident, or disease, or the dreaded rheumatism, or old age, disables him, his lot is dependence on his children if they are able to maintain him—if not, then on the parish poors'-rate. A few there are who avoid an end so entirely pitiful, by securing, in some moment of good fortune, a croft and turf cabin on the braes. Very few, indeed, push themselves further up the social scale once they have fairly joined themselves to a life of agricultural labour.

The peasant, married, finds it more difficult to get into "service" as a ploughman than when he was single. This arises from various causes, but chiefly from unmarried men being more easily housed—the bothy is all they ask for. Few farms have spare cottage accommodation. Then, too, it does not commend itself to the farmer's mind to have a lot of children about the steading, much less can he reconcile himself to the feeling

that these little ones are dependent on him, the farmer, and have advantage from their dependence. Thus it is that on large farms, "the grieve" (foreman) is usually the only married servant. Very rarely indeed are there more than two married men, the grieve and first horseman. The wife of one of them acts as dairy-woman. Both women labour in the fields in busy seasons. Thus, also, our village is chiefly filled by married peasants, whose lives of farm-labour have been interrupted by marriage, and who now find precarious wages as labourers, in the draining and trenching of land, dyke-building, stone-quarrying, and as scythemen and corn-binders at haymaking and harvest.

In the village and in the strath a few tradesmen reside; tailors and shoemakers a few, and blacksmiths and cartwrights several. They are little to be distinguished, in the ordinary case, from the peasants around them, excepting that, living by labour more or less skilled, they earn wages greater, but more precarious, than their brethren. They are marked, however, by a somewhat greater intelligence, more self-assertion, more freedom of action, and some knowledge of the world outside Glenaldie. In short, they are more like ordinary artizans, and I need not further depict them.

Such is life in our strath. The reader comprehends it fully—the dullest, dirtiest, most stupid and most vulgar of lives. Well, well, it may be even so; but where there are human lives lived out, there there must be joys and sorrows, pleasant things and sufferings. Who

cares? I wish you to care. Therefore, I have pictured for you scenes from the life in my village. Who knows but your interest, if aroused, may be enlisted for the amelioration of the peasant life around you? If only you regard these poor ones with more kindly consideration, something will be gained. I have no theory to propound, no dogma to illustrate. I only ask your sympathy.

MUCKLE JOCK.

CHAPTER I.

He is passing my window now, walking down the village street, a great hulking, gnarled lout, bent by many a day of hard labour, no doubt, too, by his own share of sorrow. He is tawny with sun and dirt. Tramp, tramp, go his heavy-gaitered limbs as he shambles homewards. He is six feet one in his stockings, but looks three inches less. He is only thirty-two, but his hair is iron-grey. A most ungainly stupid seems this plodding, heavy, knotted, lump of humanity, as he goes splash, splash, through the rain-pools—making no nice distinction of dry places, appearing even to favour wet ones, as he walks on, cold, hungry, tired, and patient withal. Well, what of him? Why, nothing very special; but that is Muckle Jock, and I am interested in him. When we chance to meet I greet him warmly, and extract from him as many grunts as possible, for so he articulates chiefly. When opportunity presents itself, I do him kindly turns, too; but he is shy both of conversation and kindness, and to shirk either would tramp a mile or two of miry lanes. I frankly confess that my friend is not sweet-smelling; but there are

things other than lavender that make humanity gracious and fragrant, and, his uncouth exterior notwithstanding, Muckle Jock is a true man.

You wish to know why I like "the monster." I am not standing up for his intelligence, but the term is misapplied. Encased in much stolidity and grossness, Muckle Jock is human-hearted; therefore it is that I like him. I will tell his story. But mark, there is little of a story to tell, and when told it signifies little —that is, to you or me, although it has frosted Jock's hair and bent him more to the earth. No doubt it has touched his heart too. A child comes to meet him; and the rough man takes the child in his brawny arms and kisses it, and goes tramping with his burden through the rain and down the lane in which his thatch-roofed cottage stands.

Jock's parentage was nothing to speak of. Indeed few of the villagers would recollect his surname if you asked it. He has always been "Muckle Jock." Gaffer Thomas, who died five years ago, was his father; and I believe Gaffer Thomas's surname was Watson. Whence the prefix "Gaffer" I do not know. Twelve years ago Gaffer Thomas was an old and frail man, broken down by rheumatism and asthma caught in the same fields in which his only son "Muckle Jock" was then earning laborious wages and bolls of meal, by which the sick and toil-worn Gaffer was kept from the poors'-roll. With them lived Betty, only sister of Jock, and daughter of the Gaffer, older than Jock by four years.

She also worked afield at harvest times, but was mostly detained within doors by the father's infirmities and the exigencies of housekeeping. Goodness knows, the "housekeeping" was of the slenderest, seeing that to boil water for Jock's daily messes of brose, and to sweep the clay floor of the cottage, comprised its gravest duties at ordinary times.

Jock lives in that cottage still. He was born there. I do not need to tell you of his school-days. They were few, short, and evil, as all our days are said to be. Few they were undoubtedly; short, for it was only in dead winter, when the kye were in the fold and the fowls of heaven could not wrong the farmer, that, his time being valueless as money's worth, Jock was driven to school; and evil, for the truth is, Jock was a dull boy, and got painfully whipped. But returning spring called him out to the green fields and to work again—to feed swine, to job about the steading, to lead the spare horse with the emptied cart; mayhap, in nobler moments, to tend the hoggets in the home-park. Thus he earned his twopence a-day and his diet of sweet milk and potatoes, at which modest wage his labour was appreciated. And as the season advanced, and when the corn was in that stage fully described in the solemn book of Newton as "in the blade," the wages were advanced to fourpence and two meals *per diem*. Then, before the landrail had ceased its nocturnal craiking, Jock appeared by the hedgerows of the green fields, and saw the gorgeous-tinted dawn, and welcomed

it by continuous revolutions of the harshly sounding "creak." Not that he had the least design to herald or welcome the rising sun. Sure I am that the weary child would rather have been in bed. But he did his duty faithfully, and that was to scare the rooks from breakfasting on the corn-lands. Thus spring, and summer, and autumn, found each its duty and labour, and consequent food for Jock. No doubt he was then merely "Jockie," or "Wee Jockie," perhaps. But he ate and grew, as by the law of nature in that case specially made and provided; and the fields which saw him a sleepy, weary scarecrow at seven, saw him successively promoted to the rank of cow-herd, hafflin', and hind. And a proud lad was Muckle Jock, when, being turned of twenty, and the tall, broad-shouldered animal you have seen, he engaged at a ploughman's full wages and bolls with Mr. Morris, the new tenant of the farm. His father's pair of horses was handed over to him, for the new tenant had rejected the Gaffer's offer of his service. Poor tired-out old man! Thenceforth for him there was but to creep into the ingle-nook, there to rub his old aching limbs, and to pipe and pine until death's gentle, if not welcome, coming, while he thanked God at each humble meal for the strong, enduring, honest son he had given to provide shelter and food when age had gnawed away the old man's strength, and rheumatism bound him to the hearth.

It was two years after this that the Gaffer had a time of sore illness, and Betty's power of endurance was

sorely tried in nursing him through it. Many nights she sat up, nights of cold and mornings of drowsiness and hunger; for Jock and she stinted themselves that the old man might have medicine and cordials such as the doctor ordered. Jock, wet and weary, offered to relieve her one night.

"Betty, lass," he said, "ye hae sat up a week on end; ye maun lat me watch the nicht."

"Na, Jock, lad; ye're wat an' cauld; ye're nae fit for watchin'; gang awa till yer bed."

"Ne'er a fut o' me will gang tae bed the nicht, Betty. If I'm wat, it'll keep me waukin'. Gang ye tae bed, lass; an' I'll gie faither his draps an' his drink a' correc', ye'll see."

And poor drowsy Betty, nearly dead with fatigue, was fain to lie down; and so Jock sat up, and sat staring at the fire. In the smouldering peats he saw fiery fields, and cattle, and castles, and trees; and he thought of the flaming sword in the Book; and was lost in wondering, wandering fancies, until he caught himself nodding; and then he got up. Gaffer Thomas was sleeping uneasily, and moaning in his sleep." "Eich me!" thought Jock, "what if he dee?" And then it came across his heavy mind that if the old man should die, he, Jock, had no money wherewithal to bury his parent. He had not learned that credit is the life-blood of commerce. Man and boy, he had never owed aught to any man; and the thought shocked him that he must go into debt in discharging the last duties to his parent.

Unhappy, he wandered round the room on his stocking-soles, until drowsily he sat down, vowing that if the Lord spared him and his, he should pinch himself until he saved up a whole pound; and his mind being thus somewhat composed, he set himself again to gaze at the fire. Again he saw forms of rampageous horses, and oxen winged with flame. Suddenly Jock thought that he was suppering his horses, and started up, upsetting the skillet with the old man's gruel, and sending it clattering along the floor.

"What is it? what is it?" feebly asked the awakened Gaffer.

"What hae ye dune, Jock, ye gouk?" sharply said Betty, tying on a petticoat as she hurried into the room.

Jock did look foolish. He was sent to bed ignominiously, and Betty resumed her weary watching.

As soon as the neighbours made sure that the Gaffer was not ill of a fever, or anything "catching," some of them came inquiring concerning him, and of these was May Johnston, daughter of old James Johnston, who lived next door. May was in the full flush of sweet nineteen. I daresay some word less saccharine than "sweet" would better describe her. Strong-limbed, full-chested, dark-haired, brown-eyed, cherry crimson dimples glowing through sunburnt cheeks, red pouting lips, white teeth. She was a charming village lass, just such a rustic maiden as painters place beside their mountain-rills, but sadly lacking in that ideality which they give to their pictures. How could it be otherwise?

May was a "bondager," or field-worker, toiling through summer's heat and winter's cold. At the snow-clad compost-heap, in the turnip-field, or reaping the golden grain, "contented she earned and ate her brown bread." May came asking for the Gaffer, and seeing the almost prostrate condition of Betty, the willing lass said she would watch the old man one night; and she did it. Home she came in the gloaming, walking two long miles from her day's work, got her supper of porridge in her father's, washed herself thereafter, and came to the sick-bed. She learned from Betty how and when the medicines were to be administered; she packed that weary woman to her bed in the closet, and promised attention to her last request—"Mind tae gie Jock his parritch het." So when Muckle Jock came in past eight, there was the strange girl sitting on Betty's stool, while Betty was snoring in the closet. Jock sat down shyly, feeling strangely unprotected, and was speechless. But May told him in a whisper that his father was not worse, and had fallen asleep after drinking his gruel with "some o' yon wine in't," on which Jock had expended a day's wages. Then Jock said "That's guid."

Now Jock "kent" the lass May. She had lived next door to him for three years, but Jock in his silent way, had never spoken to her; unless, perhaps, that as he strode into his cottage on a summer evening, he might have said "Ou ay," in reply to her "It's a braw nicht." Even the sunshine, and warmth, and brilliance of

summer could not warm Jock into conversation. Certainly, at that time, he wot not of the importance of woman's mission on the earth he so dully laboured. Fancy, then, the great dullard, as he watched the strange girl deftly pour out his porridge, and scrape the pan and heap up his plate. Jock stared silently, ate his supper, and again sat at the hearth and spake not. May asked him when the cows would calve. Milk, she said, was "gey scarce." "Ou ay, the coos 'll calve," said inarticulate Jock. So they remained in almost unbroken silence till the Gaffer's old watch on the nail above the mantelpiece pointed to ten of the night. Then said May—"Gang tae bed, Jock."

Now the truth was that for an hour past Jock had been well-nigh distraught by the thought of that going to bed. The accommodation of the cottage consisted of the kitchen and closet; and the closet had always been Betty's sleeping-place. There she was heavily sleeping now, oblivious of her brother's distress. Since the Gaffer's illness had become serious, Jock had slept on a "shake-down" in the corner of the kitchen; and he perspired at the thought of undressing and lying down there—in the presence of the "bondager." Again and again he made up his mind to go out and wander through the dark night, till it should be time to feed the horses before dawn. Possibly he might find the stable-door unlocked, and thus be permitted to share the stalled comforts of his four-footed fellow-labourers. But he had put off his boots, and they were lying at the fire-

side, drying their mud-covered "uppers," and half covered by the girl's skirts; and to resume them required effort and conversation. So Jock sat and groaned internally, and wished that his father were quite well again, and that for considerations instant and purely personal to him, Jock. The watch now in silence pointed to half-past ten; and May again urged her companion, "Come, Jock, ye maun gang tae bed;" and, as Jock groaned aloud in his mental distress, the maiden guessed at his difficulty, and said, "Ye needna mind me, man. Gae an' lie down. Ye needna pit aff yer breeks unless ye like, lad; but dinna mind me." And she got up and started Jock to his feet, and divested him of his fustian coat and waistcoat, and turned down his blankets; and anon Jock lay down on his straw, keeping on his lower integuments—the subjects of his so great concern.

Jock lay down, but not to sleep. The equal balance of his mind was disturbed, and his slow nature startled by a new and uneasy emotion. He said inwardly, "I canna sleep wi' that lass there." The jerky click of her knitting-wires went through his brain. He was still wide awake, but with his eyes fast closed, when, after midnight, the old man moved, and the kindly May attended to him; and Jock heard him say that he felt better, and that the gruel was "guid."

And he asked for Jock, "Did Jock come hame betimes?"

And May said, "Yes, puir chiel, an' he's soond sleepin' the noo."

Then Jock was more disturbed than before, and was fain to start up and rush into the cold air of night. And hours drearily passed, until at length there came to him pleasant dreams of harvest-times and of corn-fields, and of lowing cattle, and of a lass straying among golden stooks; and he, poor Jock, alone was unhappy, for he had neglected his horses, and was hurrying to them over the stubble fields, when he stumbled and awoke. There were Betty and the friend stooping over him, tickling his capacious nostrils with a straw.

Betty said, "It's five, Jock."

The "bondager" said, "Get up, Jock, or I'll get in ahint ye."

And Jock arose and resumed his garments in dazed bewilderment; and, having eaten some bread and milk that nearly choked him, he went out into the gray, chill morning, not daring to say "Good-bye" to May. Yet, somehow, the fading, twinkling stars shone that morning with a lurking merriment that Jock had never been conscious of before; and, for some undefined reason, Jock quickened his pace and trotted, not tramped, over his mile of road.

That was how it began. A hole in Jock's jerkin of stolidity had been found and penetrated; and something had got into that heart of his, and quickened it and made it thump; and for long, I fear, gnawed at it too. "O, love will venture in where it daurna weel be seen;" and Jock had begun to love May Johnston, but he did

not know it. The passion must grow and batten in that heavy nature of his.

It was on the Sunday after that restless night that Jock next saw May Johnston. She had ever since that dreamy morning indistinctly buzzed in his brain and weighted his chest. So when on the Sunday she stood at the door, congratulating Betty on the Gaffer's convalescence, Muckle Jock felt prompted to speak to her. He got up and went out, but his heart failed him. He did not so much as look at her. He walked straight into the middle of the lane, anxiously gazed all round the sky, and, feeling his heart go thudding against his ribs, walked hurriedly into the house again.

May said, "Jock, man, hoo are ye?"

But Jock went incontinently into the kitchen, and sat down near the door, unable to still that foolish heart of his while he listened to her voice talking with Betty. Thus, in secrecy and concealment, it grew on him. As the flower-slip in the dark strikes its roots and spreads out its leaves, all sickly though they be, yearning and searching for the sunshine, which is not for it, yet roots itself and grows for certain; so with our poor friend's love. Silently it struck into his soul; secretly his passion fed and grew; and not all in darkness either. Were not those moments of sunshine and radiance, when, on Sunday afternoons, he watched her from Betty's closet window, stretched on the grass in idle blessedness, or disporting herself with her youngest sister, who was quite a baby? One such Sunday Jock

resolved to speak to her. "I wull, I wull," he said to himself; "I canna bide langer wi'oot speech o' her." So, after dinner, he posted himself in the doorway of the cottage to await the nymph's appearance. It came on to rain. It poured heavily, but he was partly screened by the projecting eaves. Betty, within, cried out, asking what he meant by getting his Sunday coat wet, and received the unreasonable answer, "I wull dae it;" and Jock flinched not. But when the sought-for vision appeared, nay, even before it appeared, at the sound of her light footstep in her father's "passage," Jock betook himself into the house. Often, too, thereafter did he wander down the lane, following on the recent foot-prints of his heart's idol, knowing them to be hers mostly by the patched sole-mark. Poor Muckle Jock! he could have knelt down and kissed them, miry as the lane was, but he feared detection.

Yet Jock, although he was being consumed by this silent passion, was not diverted from his work or drawn into folly. Indeed, prudence had much to do with his reticence, for he said to himself: "It will na dae. I canna, maunna mairry. I hae three mouths tae fill, an' can feed nae mair." So, with internal groanings, he concealed his ever-growing passion. He worked resolutely. He hoarded his weekly shilling to make up the pound which he thought so necessary when the Gaffer lay ill; but as the Gaffer died not, but lived on and ate, the pound-note was by Betty cunningly introduced into the spout of the old china teapot, which stood

in brilliant prominence in the three-cornered cupboard at the angle of the kitchen-walls. And the pound had come more easily than Jock looked for. Ten shillings of it formed a prize awarded to him for the best-groomed horses at the agricultural show; where also a bronze medal was conferred on him as the second-best ploughman of the district. Had the lassie aroused Jock's latent powers that morning when she called him to awake, and sent him trotting along his road to labour? It may have been so; for he worked as he had never done before. But all around the dull horizon of his life there appeared no cloud from which Jock could expect a larger share of blessing to descend to him than the wages equal to five shillings weekly and "his bolls," of which Betty was the careful administrator.

For upwards of a year Jock concealed his love, not only from the maiden whom it concerned, but also from his own household. Its discovery was on this wise—The Gaffer often lay awake at night, as old men do; and as poor Jock lay dreaming at his side, the old man heard him speak, "May, May, dawtie!" and a pang, somewhat of jealousy and much of selfish fear, went through the old man's heart.

"Och! he's sure tae mairry an' leave his auld faither! I did it masel'; I did it masel'," he thought, and groaned; and next day he told it to Betty. To her he told also of his fear that his son would desert him. "But it's nat'ral," he said; "I did it masel', an' left ma faither an' mither tae want. I canna complain. He

has dune his duty better than I did mine by ma ain auld folk. An' for this cause will a man leave faither an' mither; ay, an' sister as weel, Betty."

But Betty bade the old man "Wheesht! I ken Jock better. While there's breath in ye, faither, Jock 'll no leave ye."

But this information as to Jock's sleeping whispers was to Betty an explanation of many odd things in Jock's behaviour of late that till now she could not account for; and as she sat knitting that afternoon, and thought back, she satisfied herself that Jock—her great, silent, solid Jock—was in love with May Johnston. No jealousy or selfishness marred her thoughts of this; for she loved her brother, not tenderly perhaps—for tenderness and emotional love pertain but rarely to the horny-handed sons and daughters of toil—but with a reasoning love that spoke to her of how much she and her parent owed to this hard-toiling man, and that rejoiced to foresee for him happiness, however humble, and a little brightness to lighten the future of his life of labour. She knew that Jock's sluggish nature could only reach that modicum of happiness and brightness through a woman's love. But she thought, "I ocht tae hae kent o' it sooner. It's nae like Jock tae conceal aucht frae me."

So while Jock was sitting at the hearth that night, Betty plumply asked him: "Jock, are ye courtin' May Johnston?"

The effect of this on Jock was peculiar. His eyes got fixed on Betty until they grew round, his face

flushed till the swollen veins seemed starting from his temples, and his mouth stood agape. At length he gasped: "Wha tell't ye, Betty?"

"Yer ainsell," said she. "Yer faither canna get sleepit wi' yer haverins about her — aye crying oot 'May, May!'"

Jock saw that his secret was discovered. His statement was honest and piteous too: "Na, Betty, I'm nae courtin' her; I wish I was."

"She's a brave lass an' a gude ane," said Betty.

"I ken it, I ken it, Betty, lass, answered Jock, with unnatural vigour; "an' I cud speak tae her the morn, but no while faither's wi' us."

That was how Jock's love found voice for the first time; and before the sun rose twice thereafter, Betty had taken May aside and told her how her brother was "bewitched" with her love; how Jock was a good "bread-winner;"—"he may e'en some day be a grieve;" and then how good a brother and son he was! Betty could not tell how good. "An' May, lass," pleaded the woman, "he is awkward aboot the like o' wommankind; but do, May, do be kind till him, an' speak him fair, the puir chiel!"

"Nane o' yer havers," said May. "Jock is na sic a gouk as tae fash me."

But Betty's earnestness, and perhaps, too, a consciousness of her own charms (for what woman is unconscious of these?), made the matter probable in the eyes of May.

CHAPTER II.

It has been written—I do think it is of modern invention—that love is selfless, begot of heavenly impulse; and, of course, as heaven-born, so also eternal. This is gratifying to our self-complacency, as tending to dignify human sentiment and to excuse human caprice. But, in truth, it is a silly conception of love, and has done much evil in the world. I conceive love to be a natural and naturally undiscriminating affection in man towards woman, and in woman towards man, mostly selfish and self-deceiving; too often an affection purely natural and carnal, and then always shortlived when the strong arm of law does not perpetuate its obligations. Certainly mainly thus, thank God not always, it is with the sons and daughters of toil, who do their wooings by the dung-heaps, with filthy fists and sweaty foreheads, and sustain affection on knotty kail-brose. Reason and social opinion influence the natural emotion, and mould it into shapes consistent with social relations, staying it, and making it calculate the burdens of woman's life and the chances of bread and kail. The dormant natural affection is easily aroused into emotional activity. Tell a woman that you love her, and the chances are that reciprocal affection will be generated. Thus do words take root and germinate, and, like the mustard-seed in

the parable, being least of all seeds, spring up into the greatest of all herbs.

So at least it was with May Johnston when Betty had sowed the seed by telling her of Jock's love. First, she thought it very funny that Jock should "tak' sic a craze intil his heid." Then she thought how big and strong, how sober and honest, how home-loving and faithful Jock was; and, again, his earnings were as much as her father's, and might hereafter be more, as Betty had insinuated. As for his uncouthness, his shyness, and silence, she disposed of them all in Betty's words—"Puir chiel!" Thus May received intimation of the man's love with no unwilling ear, and thought of it thereafter with no oppugnant heart. But while tickled and flattered by the knowledge that she had bewitched the big man without any effort on her part, and had filled him with love of her, still, after the manner of women, she thought—"I'm nae gain' tae bather; I hae ither corn tae mill;" and the seed, although skilfully sown, had the chance of dying like more material seeds. Indeed, if Jock had just then pressed his suit in person, he would undoubtedly have trodden out its vitality. But when day after day and week after week had gone by, and Jock passed in and out as usual, but looking, as she thought, more silent and more sad than theretofore, while Betty, time after time, repeated the story of his love, May often said—"Puir chiel! an' him takin' it sae quate!" Was this sedulous cultivation of the seeds of love in the girl's heart right and fair on the part of

Betty? Who can say?—but what true woman will omit an opportunity of advancing an honest love?

And now Jock had something whereon to feed the flame of love. Nightly he heard from Betty some trifling matter concerning May; and in the summer evenings and on Sundays Betty used to drag him to the closet window to watch the damsel in her mother's kail-yard. Jock's first direct and personal advance to May was in this wise:—The well from which the household water was drawn was at the distant end of the lane, a hundred yards from the cottage-door, and the water was usually fetched by Mrs. Johnston and Betty for their respective needs. But at the well Jock one evening came upon May who had just filled her pails, and he silently stepped into the hoop and walked away with the "fraught," nor spilled a drop, nor slacked his pace, as he walked more erect than usual, till he set down the pails at her cottage-door. All he said then was "Noo," with a self-satisfied laugh, while, blushing red, he hurried in to Betty, to whom, however, he did not mention the incident. Privately he was of opinion that in it he had made an open, even daring, advance to the maiden.

It was in the first days of April that Betty startled Jock at dinner-time, and put him past eating by the statement, "May will be oot o' a place at the term."

"Hoo, what way that?" gasped Jock, as his spoon fell down among his brose.

Then Betty told him that May's master had given

up his farm, and that the Earl was taking it into his own hands and laying it down in grass; so that the field women would not be required.

"I was speakin' wi' her last nicht," she said. "May has fan' oot that there's unco few changes this term a' roun' aboot. She can see ne'er a door at a' for hirin', and she's sair thochted for it."

Jock sat in deep musing for a little. Then he muttered: "I wonner if the tailor will mairry Peggy at oor farm?"

Betty had heard of this gossiped alliance, but "Indeed she didna ken."

"Ony gait," said Jock, "Peggy hasna gien up her place yet."

Jock made a pretence of resuming his meal, but he could not eat. The news had affected his stomach, and filled it with something doubtless unsubstantial and unsatisfactory, and, I daresay, flatulent. He trudged away to his afternoon yoking with a vague and hazy sensation of having been dreaming (as, indeed, he too often had) that May was hired at the Lowes, where he, Jock, was "first horseman," and that there he had wooed and won her for his bride. He could not get rid of a belief that his dreams were coming true already; and whereas at first in his reverie he had walked with doubtful step and slow, he became excited by visions which almost seemed realities, and he ended in a round trot, at which unusual pace he entered the stable. But when the grieve asked, "What's the haste, Jock?"

the dissembler said, "I maun hae thocht I was late."

But during all that yoking the question buzzed in Jock's head, "Will the tailor tak' her?" squeezing out the other question, what he should do if Peggy's place became vacant.

Now it happened that as Jock was unloosing his plough that evening, Mr. Morris, his master, came into the field—a pleasant, bluff man, who looked more than usually pleasant as he then came up to Jock.

"Jock," said he, "I count on you to be A,1. at the Burnside ploughing-match this day fortnight. Robert (the grieve) is going, and I have wagered that you'll both take prizes."

"I dinna ken aboot it," said Jock. "Wha's a' tae be there?" And while Jock was asking this question, the tailor and Peggy were still uppermost in his thoughts.

Mr. Morris then went on to tell him that forty ploughs were expected at the match—from the Haugh and Braemore, from Mains of Howe and the Bught, from near and far, and the Beauville teams, with Jamie Mowat, who a year before stood first in the field before Jock. Jock was apparently listening, but he was thinking of the tailor and Peggy, and Peggy's place, and he did not hear half of what his master said.

"I sippose Jim Mowat will be there," was what he said when his master's silence recalled his wits.

"Tut, Jock," said Morris, "have I not just said so? What are you thinking of?"

"Naething ava," said Jock.

"Tut, man," said Morris. "If that rig was not so well lined, and every furr and every foot of it so equal, I would think you were a gomeril; but mind what I say, I will give you a crown if you take a prize."

But by this time Jock had brought himself to think that he should speak to his master, and, if possible, pre-engage Peg's place; and now not only was his master moving away, but his horses were also on the move to their stable in the opposite direction.

"Whoa!" cried Jock to his beasts. "Maister," he shouted after the farmer. "Whoa, Tam; whoa, Jenny. Maister!" And when Morris returned, asking what it was, Jock could not get words, and stood gaping.

"What is it, Jock?" again asked Mr. Morris stiffly.

Then Jock muttered something, of which the farmer could only catch the words "Peggy," "the tailor," and "the term." Morris repeated these words, and asked Jock what he meant.

"She's leavin'," at length said Jock.

"I'm not sure; but what of that?"

"Naething, be—be—but I ken a lass."

Then the farmer whistled "Wheugh! Jock, ye ken a lass! Do you want her to the Lowes?"

"Jist that, maister."

"A sweetheart, Jock?"

"Na; naething but a neebour."

"Well, well, Jock, sweetheart or neighbour, take the first prize, man, and we'll have her at the Lowes if she's a likely lass at all. I believe Peg is going."

Then Jock's face brightened as he chirrupped to his horses: "Ye maun stan' by me, Tam, auld lad; Jenny, lass, ye maun be in guid fettle, and we'll show Jim Mowat what we can dae noo."

When Betty heard all this from Jock, she made up her mind to tell May nothing about Jock's intervention, and certainly nothing about the condition that Jock should take a prize. When she did go to her that night, her statement simply was, that Jock had ascertained that Peggy was leaving. She thought that May should go to Mr. Morris next day, and, if possible, secure the place. Thus was the statement limited, because Betty feared to touch the girl's pride and susceptibility; and, if May saw Mr. Morris, she thought an engagement might be made without reference to Jock. So next evening, in the gloaming, May, instead of coming straight home, went to the Lowes and saw Mr. Morris.

"I com' speirin about a place, sir. I'm telt ye need a han' at the term," she said.

"Well, I don't know, my girl. One of the women is leaving at the term certainly, but I fear the place is engaged."

The girl's bright face was instantly downcast; and the change of expression was so marked, that Mrs. Morris, who was present, and whose province it was to engage the women-servants, saw it and interfered.

"Robert, it is not half-an-hour ago since Peg said she was going for certain. You can't have another already engaged."

"It's a fact," said Morris; "I promised the place to Muckle Jock for his sweetheart."

"Sweetheart! Nonsense; Jock have a sweetheart!" said the lady.

"It's true though," said the husband, as he turned to speak to the girl. She was blushing blood-red through her sunburnt cheeks; and the farmer, seeing it, said, "Ye may be our Jock's sweetheart for all I know."

"I'm no come askin' wark or service for the sake o' onybody, man or sweethairt; and if the place is engaged my message is dune."

Mrs. Morris thought the girl's tone somewhat insolent, and rejoined, "Well, well, let it be so; but you should keep your temper when you come on such an errand."

And May went away. She had no doubt she was the sweetheart for whom the place was engaged, but she was hurt by the aspect of the affair. She was angry at Betty, who, she thought, must have known it all, and have deceived her; and "how cud that big fule, Jock, gang about saying I'm his sweethairt, all through the country-side?" She was greatly annoyed, indeed, and indignant; and when Betty went to learn how she had succeeded, she did not thank her for having sent her "on sic a gouk's errand," and hoped she would mind her own business from that time forth.

But the fortnight passed, and April was drawing to a close, and May was not engaged. The great ploughing-match at Burnside came off. Poets and historians write of bloody tournaments, and crashing steeds, and clanging armour, and wounded knights bravely suffering for famous beauties of yore. Beauty now demands less costly sacrifices, yet chivalry is not all extinct. What was the power that braced our humble friend Jock that day, steadying his grasp of the plough-stilts, guiding his reins, and hand, and eye? It looks absurd to say so; yet a pure, though lowly, chivalry nerved him for the day's work. It may have animated others, too, in that field of peaceful rivalry, for the work was so nearly of equal merit as executed by two or three of the ploughmen, that there were dire wrangling and controversy between the judges, and Morris almost fought for fair play for his men, as yard by yard the furrows were scrutinised and measured. At length it was all over, and Jock stood the winner of two first prizes, a silver medal and blue ribbon for the best ploughing, and ten shillings for the grooming of his steeds. It was seven o'clock of the evening as they passed through the village on their way to the Lowes, surrounded by a crowd of boys, whooping and harooing, for already all the villagers knew of Jock's great victories. Betty and many women were at the head of the lane. To them Jock ran in passing, shaking Betty's hand, and shaking May's too, for she was there. And there was no denying it, that, dressed in his best, and elated with his

triumph, he looked a smart fellow enough, as, having received the congratulations of the women, he hurried after the carts amid the shoutings of the boys.

Later that evening Mr. Morris of the Lowes rode into the lane. He had ascertained who it was that Jock wished to bring to the farm, and there he was to fee her. Mrs. Johnston sent the girl to the door. She went, with a heart rebellious against the chance of earning her bread, for the galling visit to the Lowes was still sore to her.

"My lass," he said, "if you come to the Lowes you are welcome."

"My wages," she said, "will be four pound ten an' my cost," which sum was ten shillings in the half-year more than she had ever earned before.

"That's ten shillings above the usual rate," said Morris. "I can't put up the wages of the farm, but I'll make it up to you, for I want to please Jock."

"Sir," she said, "I wark wi' my ain han's. There's naething atween that lad an' me, an' if I got service elsewhere, I'd no' gang tae the Lowes for yer words."

"Tut, tut, lass; you're as fiery as an unbroke colt. Will you take four pounds?"

"Tak' the arles, Maysie," said the mother from the doorway; "tak' the arles, Maysie, if ye be wise."

"Depend on it, I'll make it up to you," said the farmer; and it was no small matter to be seen of all the town that Mr. Morris had come on horseback for her. She held out her hand, into which he put half-a-crown.

A shilling is the usual earnest-money, but the farmer was after dinner, and elated by the events of the day.

"I'm yer servant frae the term, sir," said the girl.

"All right," said Morris, as he trotted off.

The term came, and May went to work at the Lowes, and Jock saw her daily in the fields, which now in his eyes had new interest and beauty. But as he had to attend to his horses both before and after the hours of field-work, he had little opportunity of love-making; for the maiden arrived at the hour of labour, and went home when the farm-bell rang. But there never was such a month of May in Jock's experience. The lark sang out more sweetly, with a volume of love in his song. The fresh greenness of the sprouting grass and braird, and the genial sunshine, were greener and brighter than Jock remembered them in other years. The very hours of labour seemed shortened since May was in the fields. But the first days of June brought a change. The sun was overcast. The fierce, chill north-east wind blew. Sleety showers fell in fitful torrents; and the women, and the men too, were chilled and pinched as they spread the manure on the fallow land, and slowly formed the turnip-drills. One of the girls had her father's top-coat buttoned round her; all happed themselves as they could, yet all were drenched and cold. But Jock had eyes and sympathy for one only, and she had just ever so small a shawlet on her shoulders. It was only a step from Jock's plough at the head-rigg to the stable, and Jock has gone

from his plough, and presently is rushing over the soaked land to the women, carrying his top-coat, and is gone up to May, who heard her comrades titter, and saw them exchange glances and smiles.

"Hae," said Jock; "pit it roun' ye," as he held out the coat.

May was very angry. "What business hae I wi' yer coat, man? Haud awa, ye an' it."

"Oh, May, May," said he, "ye're wat an' cauld."

"I bare wat and cauld afore I seed ye. Ye're no the man tae warm me."

And as Jock was pressing the coat against her, and she heard the half-smothered laughter of the women, she continued—

"Get awa', ye fule, I say; or I'll hairm ye wi' my graip."

Jock saw that instead of love, his stupid display of concern for her had only kindled anger.

"Gie me the coat," said Bell Fraser, a strapping woman of twenty-eight years, who would gladly have welcomed the first horseman to woo her. "Gie me the coat, Jock; I wunna deny ye."

But Jock said, "Na, na; it's only for May—only for May. Wunna ye hae it, May?" he asked humbly.

She made him no reply, and with lengthened strides and drooping head, he slunk back over the furrows to his plough. In that hour the woman *knew* he loved her.

Mrs. Morris heard of this love-passage, and she got

to May about the farm, and spoke to her kindly, and made occasions for her coming to the kitchen; and having thus founded a good feeling, she spoke of Jock, and why did the girl repulse him? The maiden, thus taken in gracious mood, frankly owned, "It wasna wise; but Scotch love is fechtin', ye ken, mem." And matters thereafter went on more smoothly, although Bell Fraser, believing that Jock meditated matrimony, made a decided attack on his heart and person. She played pranks on him at the steading, assailing him and tussling him at unawares, nor heeded his gruff grunting, "Be aff, ye baggage!" Once she waylaid him on his way home to the village at night, and seized him round the waist, and the strong man had to use his strength to rid himself of her; and then he fairly fled homewards. Now it happened that the grieve's little daughter saw this struggle on the road, and the story got out among the workers in various editions, amended and enlarged. It marked a great improvement in May's state of mind, that when a friend—and how spiteful friends can sometimes be—came telling her, "Jock has Bell Fraser noo aye tae meet him gaun hame, an' he toozles her bravely."

"It's a *lee*," she said. "It's a' fause. I ken Jock. He'll neither meddle nor mak' wi' the like o' her."

"My certy! ye're gey croose an' sure o' him," was the friendly reply.

"Sure o' him, or no sure o' him, Jock's a honest, leal lad, an' winna wrang or pit han' on a mither's

dochter amang ye; an' I wunna hear him fausely spoke o'."

And while on a hundred little occasions Jock made his love of her apparent to her, and she silently but pleasantly received it, he wisely abstained from the slightest repetition of its open display; and the months passed on in great comfort for Jock. Then harvest was ingathered, and during the September moon, and the corn-leading by its light, Jock, night after night, went home with May. She waited for him at the kitchen; because, as she told the lasses, "that scapegrace, Tam Fraser, wanted to convoy her; but she was safe wi' Jock."

This she also let Jock know; and Jock said, "Thank ye, May, for takin' me."

Then after harvest came the Hallowmas Fair. Now the Hallowmas Fair was the great holiday of the summer half-year, the one day of freedom and dressing, of gallanting and flirtation, of music and dancing, of drinking and shouting, and on it the labouring population of twelve miles round flocked to the village to gratify their several tastes. Jock went to the Lowes as usual, saw to the welfare of his horses, and jobbed about till his usual dinner-hour, when he went leisurely home. He met the Gaffer at the cottage-door.

"Betty wasna in. She gaed oot twa oors syne."

But the old man had "biled the pot," and Jock made his own brose, and ate it, while the hum and tumult of the fair came to him from the distant end of the village,

mingling with the fifes and drums of the recruiting party. Then he put on his Sunday clothes, hung his medals round his neck, and went out. He quickly purchased a whole pocketful of brilliantly-coloured sweetmeats, and then went round the outskirts of the crowd and through it. There was no doubt about it, he was looking for May. At last, in the weltering, pushing crowd in front of Mr. Merryman's booth he found her laughing at the capers of the clown. His gorgeous stock of "sweeties" was speedily tied up in her white handkerchief as "a fairin';" and they elbowed their way through the crowd to the Green. And Jock had another gift in his pocket, which burned while it was there.

"Will ye tak' it frae me?" he asked, as he put it into her hand.

It was only a crooked sixpence. She did take it, saying, "Ye're a silly chiel."

And "whee-whe-whee-whoo," and "raw-ra-ta-ta" came the fifes and drums, and louder shouted the crowd as it opened up a passage, and the soldiers marched past with glittering weapons and streaming ribands.

May cried out, "Losh me! there's Jamie wi' the sodgers."

And sure enough there was her brother James, a tall, overgrown lad of eighteen, walking very proudly and a little unsteadily beside the sergeant of the party. In an instant May had rushed to him and grasped him by the arm, and was dragging him away. But the sergeant interfered and laid hold of James, and confronted

May, saying, "My pretty girl, he is only going to walk to the Square. Come along with us and see him safe."

He spoke with winning smiles and easy gallantry, and sheathed his sword and offered May his arm.

"Come along, May," said Jamie. "I'm gain' whatever."

And in an instant they were gone arm in arm through the crowd into the village Square, whither Jock followed in wonder and displeasure. He saw the party break off amid loud cheering; and May and Jamie went with the sergeant and the soldiers into a drinking-booth; and then Jock was angry. He hung about the booth for a while, and then entered it, in some excitement, to see why May was staying there. As he entered, the corporal and Jamie passed out. There on a form sat the sergeant and May, his hand on her waist and his whiskers unduly near to her laughing face; while the whole of Jock's sweeties, white, yellow, and pink, lay scattered on the floor. Jock went quietly up to her—

"Come awa', May."

"Sit doun, Jock, an' gaether yer goodies for me. The serjan' skailled them," said she.

"Na, na," said Jock. "Honest folk an' sober folk aye haud clear o' the sodgers. Come awa, lass."

But she did not move. The soldier offered Jock a dram; but Jock "never drank nane;" and then Jock left the booth sorely vexed and angry.

He walked along, caring little in his bitterness where he went; but he had not gone far when he

rubbed his eyes in astonishment. Was that really Betty coming out of the show "linket on a gentleman?" Jock's heart sadly misgave him. Betty in her best things looked well, but the man with her was too well dressed, as Jock thought, for keeping her company. Jock followed them, and saw Betty treated to cakes and ginger-beer, and other fine things, while he stood glowering at a distance. At last a man came by whom he knew.

"Wha's yon wi' Betty?" asked Jock.

"Oh, dinna ye ken? Yon's the gauger. He's been courtin' her this while sin syne."

"Dae ye ken him?" asked Jock.

"No me," replied the man. "I dinna ken him; but a'body says he's a sportin' blade an' a sair han' amang the lasses;" and the man went on his way.

Jock was sorely troubled. He stood staring till Betty and her partner disappeared in the crowd. Then he went home, and sat moodily smoking his pipe. But he was restless, and soon got up and went out again, this time to the Lowes and his horses. When the animals neighed at his coming, he said to himself: "The puir beasts 'll no gie me ony sair heart;" and he remained at the steading till night.

At supper he asked Betty about "yon man," saying he "didna like his looks at a'."

But Betty said, "Wheesht, Jock. Maybe I'll soon mak' room for May;" and Jock was silent.

Next morning the steam-mill at the Lowes was

going, and all hands were busy thrashing out the grain. May was there, but Jock did not speak to her, although she loaded his cart with the pitch-forked sheaves. But about ten o'clock her mother came running to the steading with her apron to her eyes. She was crying. After a few words together, mother and daughter went hurriedly off to the village, desiring one of the women to tell the grieve "something haed gane wrang at hame, an' him no tae be angry."

Jock saw all this, the mother's weeping and the daughter's excitement, but he would not ask what was the matter; and his heart was hardened, and he "didna care." Now this was the matter. The soldiers had come claiming Jamie as a recruit, and had warned him to appear before the Justice, at two o'clock that afternoon. Jamie was a weakly lad and overgrown. He had sat all that morning at the fireside, with aching head and feverish pulse, from the unwonted dissipation of the previous day. His mother had fretted, and scolded, and called him ill-names, and warned him of evils that were in store for him. But when the soldiers came and said he was "listed," then she flung her arms about his neck, and called him "her puir, lost bairn."

"He'll dee, he'll dee, if ye tak' him tae the sodgers," she said to the corporal, "an' his bluid 'll be demandit at yer han's. He's ne'er a day richt weel wi' me, his mither nursin' him, an' he's sure no tae live."

The corporal said he would make an excellent

servant to her Majesty, and would soon become strong. She wrung her hands, and sobbed, and cried; and the Gaffer, who had come to the door on seeing the soldiers, now hearing Mrs. Johnston's piteous complainings, went to her, urging her "No tae tak' on that gait, wumman; ye maybe can manage to pay the smairt." One of the children was then sent for the head of the family, and old Johnston came and heard it all. He looked very grim as he said—

"I hae na twa shillings i' the warld this day. I wunna tak' on debt. Wha wad len' me, ony wise? But I wunna tak' the bread, which is scant enow already, frae ma bairns' mous, and squanner it on this prodigal. He has made his bed, an' maun lie on it."

But inwardly the old man's heart was bleeding, and his spirit was in bitterness for his only son, and he was praying to the Lord for light and relief. And what was all the difficulty, since the smart-money is only twenty-one shillings? A trifle, no doubt, to you, reader, or to me, but a serious sum to this poor head of a large family, with its many mouths, and many wants. Indeed, in this poor village, years pass after years, and the great bulk of the people never see a pound note; and of the whole inhabitants perhaps a dozen only, including "the merchant" and the innkeeper, could conveniently have lent the sum.

It was when old Johnston had thus expressed himself that his wife ran off to the Lowes to seek strength and aid from her strong-minded daughter. By the time

they got home May saw the full difficulty. One shilling and Jock's sixpence was all her store. How she blamed herself now. If she had not listened to the serjeant. If she had held on by Jamie, and taken him by force. If she even had that half-crown that went in ribbons. How senseless she had been! How humble she was now, while within her her heart's cry was—"Oh for a pound afore two o'clock!" "Wud her faither gang oot wi' her tae seek it?" No, he would neither borrow nor beg, nor tell his sad sorrow and disgrace; and he sat down and covered his face with his trembling hands. May must go out herself. To whom should she go? She resolved to try the village merchant. He was an elder of the church, and a very civil and polite person. May knew him only by having invested part of her wages in dress in his shop. So to him she went and told her tale. Would he kindly lend her a pound? She would be sure to pay it back. But he forthwith preached of vice and sin, at first in the abstract, but soon with direct personal reference to May, charging her with keeping company with the soldiers, which he had seen her do openly yesterday, and which, he warned her, was the broad road to shame and sorrow. Could she expect other results than that her brother would enlist? Finally, winding up with a pious exhortation, he declined to lend the pound. May's heart was too full and too humble to do battle for herself with the village magnate, even had she been disposed to quarrel with his facts or conclusions. Indeed, his highly respectable

black dress and shining bald head put his sentiments beyond discussion. His view of her conduct frightened May, disposed as she was to blame herself; and his peremptory refusal of the loan crushed all hope within her heart. She could not ask elsewhere. It was difficult for her to refrain from crying in the shop, and she must hurry home to have her cry out. So home she went, and shut herself up in her closet, and wept alone. Betty went to her, but she would not admit her, and she was offended, too, because Betty seemed so calm and so unsympathising. Betty went away to prepare Jock's dinner.

When Jock came home shortly after one, the soldier was there at the top of the lane, trim and bright, and he gaily whistled and poised himself and twirled his cane, and Jock felt a strong inclination to knock him down. But as he entered his cottage, Jock heard the sobs and ejaculations of Mrs. Johnston, "Jist ae oor an' they'll tak' him frae me; jist ae oor! O Lord." Then Betty explained the affair and told of the great distress of the Johnstons, and of May's effort and failure to get the loan of a pound. Jock sat down and supped his brose without a word. In a little, the corporal stepped lightly to the Johnstons' door and said, "The recruit must be getting ready," which was followed by a louder burst of grief.

Then said Jock, "Gie them faither's pound."

This was what Betty had been waiting for, and she executed the commission speedily. What she did or

said is not material, but the results certainly were. May walked into the Gaffer's kitchen, with her face bleared, and the tears in her eyes. Jock was sitting at the deal table at the window still supping his dinner.

"Jock," she said, holding out her hand, "Ye're the true man. I ken ye luve me, an' I'm no worth it; but if ye'll tak' me, here's ma han', an' I'll be true tae ye till deth."

Jock had started to his feet in the progress of this speech, and was facing the maiden, spoon in hand, and with staring eyes.

"I ca-ca-canna," he said.

"But I'll bide yer ain time, Jock; an' I'll aye be true."

"Kiss her, man, wunna ye?" said Betty; and in an instant Jock had flung the spoon on the table, and his arms round May's neck, and had tasted the first kiss of love.

CHAPTER III.

WHETHER or not the great and beautiful gourd of love has oft-times its root in tiny words, sometimes like the prophet's gourd springing up in a night, it seems altogether certain that loving words and acts, like heaven's gentle dew to material plants, give it nutriment and verdure. Love may be a sickly, parched, even perishing plant, but if the lover, in whose soul it is rooted, will drop but one loving word, then, refreshed and greenly it buds and blossoms as into gracious flowers and fruits of love, flagrant and delightful, thus resulting like all spiritual exercises.

When Jock came home that night, Jamie Johnston met him at the door and thanked him for his deliverance; and Jock had hardly finished his supper when May came in and stood behind his chair, and laid her hand on his shoulder. The Gaffer, instinctively feeling that he was not wanted, slipped out to smoke a pipe with old Johnston; and then, when the maiden was alone with Jock and Betty, she kissed him and thanked him, and he drew her silently on his knee, and her arms were round his neck and her face on his breast. A few, only a few, little words were spoken by her, while the great silent man held her there in his abashed and speechless way. This was the consummation of Jock's love visions

for two years past. But mark how alloyed are all earthly pleasures, and how material things will vindicate a supremacy over mental. While thus she sat with him in all lovingness, Jock found himself oppressed and full of stupidity and uneasiness. The maiden was of ample size and heavy, and Jock was unaccustomed to nursing; and thus when the weight of love had crushed his limbs for a little, during which he was lost in delight, he awoke to a sense of numbness and embarrassment. He knew that it could be cured by shifting his position; but the position was altogether so novel and so delightful, that in his stupid way he dared not shift it, and thus the numbness increased. Then, after a slight movement on the part of his lovely burden, came those tingling sensations, just on the border-land of pleasure and pain. Jock wished she would get up, not in words—he could not then have uttered as many words—but inwardly; and he bore the tingling heroically for a time. But he suddenly succumbed. Almost frantically he shoved away May, wildly started up to the alarm of the girls, almost tumbled over Betty, and began to stamp about. It was some time before he explained that his "leg was sleepin'." Then the lasses, with loud laughter, seized him and rubbed his limbs, and compelled him to promise that henceforth his personal discomforts should be told without hesitation; and thereafter Jock went to bed to dream of a future of light and joy with that maiden in visionary corn-fields.

Next morning May was waiting for her Jock when

he set off to his work, and side by side they went together. And there was no concealment, but every one knew that she had taken the silent man for "her lad," and that by-and-by they were to be man and wife.

"When?"

"Why, when it'll suit him, tae be sure. I can bide his ain time an' ne'er fret," said she.

Now there was no more frowning, no more misunderstanding, no more rejection of offered kindnesses, no more flinching from the tittering or jibes of the women.

"Wha o' ye wadna be prood tae tak' him?" she said to them. "Leastways I'm a pleased woman, an' I'll be a true wife in God's time."

And the days and weeks of toil flew by, and Jock lost much of his taciturnity and unreadiness through his intercourse with the sprightly girl, and was clothed and crowned with love and blessedness as he drove his plough and ate his frugal fare.

But to one poor heart time did not bring pleasure. Betty was unhappy. Jock, bound up in his own love, had concerned himself but little with the gauger. Indeed, when he missed Betty night after night from the fireside, while he rejoiced in the presence of May darning stockings or clouting old clothes, and whiles love-making on his knee, he thought her absence was to be ascribed to the desire to give May and him quiet opportunity. Unhappily, it was not so. She had fallen into the way

of meeting the gauger outside, and of wandering with him in darkness and alone. Oh, sad darkness and solitude! Does true and honest love ever seek them? Did Betty ever ask herself whether the well-dressed gauger, who enticed her to meet him thus, was really shrinking from open acknowledgment of interest in the working girl? Perhaps she did; and no doubt, too, she quieted her fears by repeating his vows and recounting his social difficulties so frankly spoken of. Undoubtedly she believed that he would one day own her in the sunlight and before the world. Dear girls! If any man, the most God-like, sue you in love's court, and will not take its arbitrament at your father's hearth, distrust and avoid him. Honest love, whence happiness springs, has no disguises, no concealment; and there is no more slippery pavement hellwards than hidden love and hidden opportunity.

One night Betty came home, and her eyes were red with weeping; and she silently passed into her closet, passed May and Jock by the fire, and they saw not that she sorrowed. She had parted from her sweetheart, who was removing next day to a distant station, to which he had been appointed. They had parted with many kisses and promises on his part—with many kisses and tears on hers. She did not then know it; but she was never to see him again—never to hear from him, perjured and faithless; and her heart that night was full of love and hope, even while she wept, for she trusted him. But when week after week passed and brought her no mes-

sage, then her heart began to fail her, and her cheek grew pale. She did not, she could not conceal her great grief from May; and as she told it they wept together in sisterly embrace. Artlessly Betty told how she had hoped to have been "out o' the road o' Jock and May," and had dreams of two weddings on one day—hopes blighted, dreams vanished in the hard and cruel sense of forsakenness which now surrounded her. May told it to Jock, and the news made him sad too, though he said nothing.

"Ye, too, wad leave me, Jock, gin ye cud," said May. "It's jist the way o' a' you men."

But Jock replied, "The lan' 'll no grow corn when I'll leave ye;" and plainly the cases were not at all parallel.

As Betty's love-meetings had not been altogether unobserved by the village community, so her lover's faithlessness and her own grief did not escape notice. The women all voted that she deserved her fate, and might have foreseen it. "What better could have been expeckit? Her setting her cap at ane aboon her equals!" Others said, "War she as honest a lass as she preten's, the like o' him wad na hae gien her sae muckle o' his company. It wasna a wife he wanted—we kent that fine." What signified their ill-natured gossip? But poor Betty must blench and pine, and sadly wander by the lonely paths so often traversed with her false lover—with a sad and bitter pleasure in the memory of each spot. Each morning found her with

weighted and desolate heart, awaking to new bitterness without tincture of pleasure. She was restless by day, often sleepless by night, and ever unhappy. Then when the days began to lengthen in March, she ceased to go out excepting of necessity. Suddenly she announced to May that she was resolved to go to service at Whitsunday, and that she, May, must "get ready tae come hame tae Jock." She did not tell that her thoughts were of flight from her home and kindred, and that shame was the motive; nor that last time she was down the village, Luckie Balders had "spiered for the gauger;" and said, "Weel, weel, lass, if ye wunna hae a weddin', maybe we'll hae a chirsnen' (christening) whatever." May guessed not the whole of poor Betty's sorrow, and opposed Betty's proposal stoutly.

"Jock an' me are in nae hurry at a'; an' ye maunna think o' service the noo."

But Betty was resolved. She would go to Inverwick to seek service and a change, she said, at Whitsunday; and they were compelled to submit. Thus it was arranged that Jock and May should be married at that term, and that Betty should go forth to the world; ostensibly seeking change and peace—but really concealment, and she knew not what.

Betty's too evident suffering did not make itself felt by Jock as might have been expected of one so thoughtful of the material comforts of those dear to him. He was not an intelligent observer of things in general, much less of facial changes, or of the emotions of others.

Besides, he was now absorbed in the anticipation of his approaching marriage, which was ever present, in a stupid way, to his slowly-working mind. And Betty's desertion made him very dear to May, who did not conceal from all around her how fortunate she thought herself in the poor fellow's love. "What's goud or dimans (diamonds) or onything by his luvin' hairt?" she said; "I wudna change him for a king. Gran' things are aye deceitfu'." Little did she think, in the flush of love, how deceitful and unstable are all human life and affairs; and not at all did she anticipate the coming evils that were to mar her happiness and the happiness of the man she loved. Meantime she hung upon him and hugged him, "Her ain fond lover, her ain true love;" while he, with silent caresses and violent and expressive squeezes, assured her of his unchangeable affection.

It was a pleasant evening in April, and Jock and May were going homewards, his arm round her waist, she carrying his pitcher of milk. The setting sun was tinging the distant hills with golden light, and bathing the village in soft effulgence. As they walked in silent pleasure, a quarter of a mile from their homes, they heard the feeble cries of a child from the ditch by the roadside. May gave the pitcher to Jock, and hastened to the spot. It was a little child, three years old, "a love bairn" of Bell Lowe, the rag-gatherer. It had wandered in the glorious sunlight so far from the village, and had stumbled and fallen into the ditch, and had there lain screaming and unable to extricate itself, until May

picked it up. She took it gently in her arms, telling Jock whose it was, and she soothed it; and they gave it of their milk to drink. The child was rolled up in a curiously-fashioned old pelisse; and May, as she carried it, wondered at the strange piece of dress, and how and where the rag-gatherer had got it. And slyly looking at Jock, she asked if he would like to own a boy like that, and made game of him when he said he did not know. She carried the child to its mother's door, and there set it down, wondering at the unwonted tenderness of its casual nurse; for, God knows, Bell, its mother, had little love or tenderness in her ways.

In all womanly goodness, May had raised up and carried this waif of humanity; and you and I looking on and seeing her take pleasure in such tenderness after her day of toil, would have thought that before Heaven the act would have appeared with much sweetness and acceptability, commended with blessing and increased grace by the Highest. How inscrutable is Providence! Who can read it? Two days thereafter May was seized with headache and vomiting, and the early chills and heat of incipient fever. It came on her in the field about noon, and she was so unwell that Jock asked the grieve to look after his horses, while he went straight home with his ailing lass. With difficulty she got home, weary, languid, sick at stomach, and with aching head, "whiles shiverin', whiles burnin'," as she described her state to Jock, she who had "never been a day unweel since she had the measles, aught year syne."

She was laid down in her bed in the cramped little closet, where Jock went to see her before he started for his afternoon yoking. Her eyes were viscid, her skin hot and dry, her whole appearance changed. With forced gaiety she said to him, "Wunna ye bide, man, an' lie doun wi' me?"

Poor Jock shuddered at her husky, hard, hollow voice, and it came to him that she was to be taken away. He could not speak, but he looked on her with tearful eyes. With another effort, she said, "Ye wud sooner pairt wi' me than frae yer horse beasts; but kiss me, Jock;" and then Jock went away with heavy heart to his work. At night she was worse; and Betty took the two little girls, May's sisters, who used to sleep with May, to share her bed, for May was clearly in for some bad trouble; and Betty, with white face, said to Jock, "I wish tae God it was me."

Next day she was still worse, sorely fevered, and her face grievously swollen; her voice faint and husky. Even in this her sore trouble she had a kind word and feeble smile for Jock when he came to see her. That evening Bell Lowe's love bairn was dead—the doctor said of suppressed small-pox. That strange piece of dress had done it all—Bell in her wanderings had picked it up in a rag-store at Inverwick, full of infection, and had dressed her child in it, and the child had gone forth in the pride of its fine rags, and May had found it. Now the child was dead. Dr. Blake came to May too, having heard that she was ill, and pronounced her case

one of small-pox also; and he resolved to isolate the case, if possible, hoping to prevent the much dreaded disease from spreading among the villagers, so ill suited to withstand its rage. So old Johnston and his family (his wife who had had small-pox alone excepted) were removed from the house and scattered where best they could find quarters. All and sundry the neighbours were warned, as they valued their lives and the lives of others, not to set foot within the infected dwelling. The doctor, too, who knew something of Jock and his love of the patient, specially forbade him to enter the house.

"Hoo can I bide awa'?" said Jock.

Then the doctor told him that the disease was of a very bad type, and that it would be nothing short of murder for him to go into the house and probably to spread infection. Jock promised obedience, and turned away from the door with a sad presentiment stamped into him that May was surely to die. He wandered about in the lane, or lingered near the door all through the night, and often he tapped at the window and asked, "Hoo is she noo?"

When morning broke, the business of life led him away to toil, but not before on his bended knees he had prayed aloud to God the prayer which all night had lain inarticulate at his heart—"Spare her, O Lord, spare her!"

All day, too, at his plough, the same unspoken prayer went up for his love; and day and night

went round with heavy, leaden pace; day unto day uttering sorrow, and night after night black with pain and fear. The case was a severe one of confluent small-pox. Jock was worn out by his love-imposed vigils, and his almost total abstinence from food, for Betty could scarcely get him to eat a mouthful.

"Hoo can I eat, an' May like tae dee?"

All his pleasant things seemed turning to grief and ashes. He could not rest; he could not work.

"He has no settlement nicht or day," the Gaffer said.

He could scarcely pray that one prayer for her for whom he was thus troubled.

"I'm unco stupid, an' kin' o' dazed like," he said to Mr. Morris; "an' whiles, wi' the weicht o' ma trouble, I'll no mind what's the maitter wi' me."

At length, on the eighth day, the doctor said to Jock, "If she does well to-morrow, the worst will be past."

That night when Jock came home, Mrs. Johnston told him "the lassie was very bad;" and Jock's distress increased as he walked up and down the lane in front of the cottages.

"This may be her last nicht o' life," he said to himself.

Near to midnight Betty came to him and walked by his side in the chill moonlight. When they came near the houses again, she said, "God help you, Jock, I fear she'll dee. I wish to God it was masel."

Jock howled aloud like a stricken hound, and wept; and again she repeated, "I wish to God it was masel'."

Her face was very pinched and white, and her voice

and words went through Jock with a shiver, that he remembers even now in hours of reflective pain. Then Betty left him, and he went and hung about the window. He heard the painful moaning and stifled voice of May, his dying May. What! was she speaking of him—"Jock?" He was sure he heard her say "Jock;" and he turned away and wept again. Now he was sure that she was dying. Did not Betty say it? She must have been told by Mrs. Johnston or the doctor, and desired to break the sad tidings to him. And far down the lane he threw himself on the ground and writhed in distress, saying, "Would God I could dee for her." Then he remembered that the Gaffer was dependent on him, and repeating, "Would God I could dee for her," he checked himself and got up, saying, "It maunna be; I hae ithers tae live for. God's will be dune." But again he was on his knees, praying the Lord to spare her—"Spare her, O Lord; I'll dae onything if ye'll spare her," he cried aloud to the night.

Then he went stealthily back to the window, and again heard her sounds of pain; and he crept off into the night, and sat down twenty yards away under the hedge, and fell fast asleep. When he awoke, stiff and cold, the stars were still shining, but the dawn was blushing in the distant east. He crept again to the window. All was still within the cottage, but he heard Mrs. Johnston snoring. He heard no sound from the closet.

"Can May be dead an' her mither sleepin'? O Lord!"

The thought was agony, and he sank down on the ground beneath the window-sill. There he sat till the day began to brighten; and, at length, within the cottage he heard Mrs. Johnston's voice. He tapped lightly at the window, asking if God had preserved them. Did he hear aright? May had slept for two hours, and was easier. Mrs. Johnston came to the door, and standing at cautious distance, she told him that May had been very ill before she slept, and was raving about him—"Did I say that I wad hairm ma Jock? I cud wipe his feet wi' ma hair;" and many such unreasonable things. But she had slept, and was calm again. Jock thanked God, and went and fed his horses. He was back within an hour. The doctor had said that this was the day of crisis, and Jock "cudna bide awa."

The crisis was come, and May got over it, and got well; but slowly, slowly came returning health; and when, at the end of three or four weeks, Jock was permitted to see her again, he could scarcely recognise the idol of his affections in the lump of pinky red flesh that lay in the little bed. Of course, Whitsunday, now close at hand, must pass without their marriage. Indeed, the maiden's severe indisposition, her narrow escape from the jaws of death, gave a seriousness to their feelings, which made the question of matrimony small and trivial, since their affection was unalienated. Indeed, they had lost nothing of their mutual love. It was

crushed, but the compression had strengthened it and bound them more closely together. Affliction had sanctified it. Now for the first time they thought of themselves not merely as living for themselves, but as actors in a changeful world—a world full of labour, care, pain, and serious things, with that solemn boundary of death. But another and still sadder trial awaited them; and it came while still the seams and scars of the last were fresh on May, and while all the strength she had acquired only enabled her with difficulty to creep into the sunshine.

Jock came home one day to dinner, and found the Gaffer awaiting him, but not Betty. The Gaffer was in great distress, for Betty had gone away early, before the old man had got out of bed, leaving a little note on the table, a very ill-scrawled note, blotted with tears, stating that she would be absent for ten days at least. This would have been enough to startle and distress the old man; but Mrs. Johnston, whom he had consulted, had confided to him her fear that Betty was about to become a mother. The old man cursed his neighbour when she said it; but next minute he was wringing his hands, believing that the fear was too truly founded. And the feeble old man and his strong rough son wept together. They were bewildered, not knowing whither she had gone. But May came in with a flood of love and light—"Tae be sure, Jock, she's gane tae Innerwick. Ye maun follow her straucht; an' whan ye

fin' her oot, speak her tenderly and bring her back. If ocht is wrang, we can bear it here wi' her for love's sake. She maunna deny ye. Tak' the road het fut, lad."

She stuffed his pockets with oat cakes. He stayed not for dinner, and with kisses she sped him on his errand of sadness and love.

It was six o'clock of the evening when Jock, fatigued with his walk, reached the town. What was he to do now that he had got there? He knew nobody, and wandered up and down the streets, staring around him, hoping to encounter his lost Betty at every corner. But he saw her not. He began to grow faint and sick. The bustling crowds, the hurrying vehicles, the unwonted cries and turmoil, and, perhaps chiefly, the want of food, all induced a feeling of weakness and despair, now that he had wandered long through the streets and seen nought of his sister. Evening, too, was growing into night, and he began to think of leaving the town and seeking shelter somewhere in the country round it. He had drawn himself feebly to the toll-bar on the Glenaldie road, when who should drive up but his master. Mr. Morris had been at the village that afternoon to enquire why Jock came not to his work, and having learned the facts, he had now come to look after and to aid his faithful ploughman. The world seemed changed by the presence of this one man. Jock instantly recovered tone both of body and mind. He told his unsuccessful wanderings. Morris communicated with

the police, and Jock was fed and put to bed; and, I believe, now that his excitement was over, he cried himself to sleep. But in the early grey of morning he was aroused by Mr. Morris and a policeman. She of whom he was in quest had been found. Morris told him solemnly to prepare for the worst, and to set his strength in God.

"She canna hae hairmed the bairn," Jock said. "Betty ne'er wud dae that."

They said, "No; but if the woman traced by the police was his sister, then she was dead."

They brought him to a humble house in a lowly part of the old town. There was a woman at the fireside feeding a baby with syrup. There was a low bed in the room covered with a white sheet, and under the sheet was the outline of a body. The policeman turned his bull's-eye on the bed, and turned down the sheet; and Jock recognised the pinched face and white cheek, more pinched and pallid now, of her, who, in her sisterly love of him, had wished to God before the midnight that she was even so—dead.

I have often wept while picturing that scene of sorrow; but, now, will veil the sorrow with silence. The child that met Jock, and whom he took in his arms a little ago and bore to his cottage, was the baby of that morning; and although Jock and May were married that summer, and although they have had several children, that one—"Little Betty"—is all that death has spared to them. She is the poor

man's ewe lamb, so sorrowfully bought and nurtured, which has grown up together with him and his little ones that are gone. It eats of his meat and drinks of his cup, and lies in his bosom, and is unto him even as a daughter. Pray God that no rich man covet it.

Do you wonder that I like the rough man?

KATE ROSE AND 'HER BAIRNS.'

CHAPTER I.

I FIRST saw Kate when she was sixteen years old, and my visit to her then was under melancholy circumstances. It was on the evening of the day on which her mother was buried, and she and two younger children were now orphans, and in a strange land, for they had been in the district for five or six years only. Kate was a strange creature to look at. She was about four feet six in height, while her girth was quite as much. Her face was square; her cheeks heavy; her eyes and expression vague. A jacket or bed-gown of worsted stuff, secured by a straw band round her immense waist, and a petticoat of wincey, constituted her dress. Just then she had a strangely anxious look, bewildered and somewhat wild. The sexton had come to me that afternoon and told me of her arrival on the previous night. She had been in service at some distant place for one or two years past, and had now, on getting word of her mother's death, run back to the hovel that was called her home.

"She's a strange creatar," said the man. "There's no a pick o' meat inside the door. The neebours hae been offering her meal an sic like, but she winna hae it, saying, 'she's nae a beggar yet;' but the twa little anes may stairve. It's a good job we got the mither coffined afore she cam', else she wudna hae lettin' us beerry the auld woman yet, I'm thinkin', 'cause the session paid for the coffin."

I had called on her in consequence of this information. When I entered, she was sitting on a stool at the hearth, and she had the two children beside her, with an arm round each. There was no fire. She turned her strange, stolid face to me as I entered, but did not rise or speak. The only chair in the room looked very crazy, so I took a low stool to the opposite side of the hearth and sat down. We sat in silence for some minutes, during which she seemed entirely to ignore my presence, remaining motionless with her arms round her little ones. At last I said, "I knew your father, and have come to see if I can help you."

She surveyed me carefully, and did not reply for several minutes. Then her answer was, "Ye're braw;" and then after a pause, "Ye wisna at the beerial."

I explained that my health did not permit me to attend funerals; but that now I would gladly aid her in her trouble.

"But ye wisna at the beerial," said she again.

I was completely disconcerted. What could I make of such a creature?

Just then the little boy in her right arm said, piteously, "Oh! winna ye gie me ma meat?"

And a convulsive shudder passed through Kate's large frame; and she kissed the boy, saying—"Wheesht, ma bairnie."

"You must allow me to send some food for these children," I said.

Her reply was almost fierce, "Am no a beggar."

This was just as the sexton had told me; and I did not well know what to say next. I resorted to the dialect of the district. "Ye see am no vera rich, but there's mony nae sae weel aff; an' whiles I gie the len' o' twa three shillings whan folk need it, an' I aye get it back, ilka bawbee o't, wi' a blessing sometimes. I'll len' ye the noo, an' ye'll pay me back whan ye win it."

It was some time before she answered me. "Ma-an, ye're a frien'!" Then after a pause, and with emphasis "Weel, weel then."

I understood she would take a loan, so I got up and offered her ten shillings. She counted them, one, two, three, and so on, on the window-sill. Then she slowly counted five over again, and took up the five and put them in my hand, saying, "Yon'll dae."

So I left her, wondering at her singularity, and how she came to possess that spirit of independence. But before I left her, I patted the little heads that were in her charge, and spoke kindly words to them. Some time afterwards I learned that the hard farmer, whom

she had just left, had refused to give her any part of her wages because she went away at mid-term.

The family had strolled into the village some five or six years before. The father was an itinerant seller of razor strops, and mender of umbrellas. He was a very little man, scarcely four feet in stature, and slight of figure, contained in a swallow-tailed coat greatly too large for him, and crushed by a dress hat. He called at my cottage soon after he came among us, and I gave him a casual job, by which he earned a shilling; and while he worked, I conversed with him. He was intelligent, extremely dignified, and had a politeness of manner, savouring even of condescension. His soul was larger than its earthly tabernacle. We talked of places and persons he had seen in "his travels," for he assured me he was "a great traveller." Thereafter, when I met him in the street, he used to salute me by raising his battered chimney-pot hat with the most graceful of bows, which courtesy I as formally acknowledged, and this apparently gave satisfaction to him. But I learned that the village boys, too often emissaries of Satan sent to buffet peculiar men like Mr. Rose, occasionally made game of the little man, and in derision had nicknamed him "Wee Mannie Monsie."

He was not left long in the land. One stormy winter night I was passing through the lobby of my house, when I heard a tapping at the house door. I opened it, and saw a tiny figure in the rain and darkness, and I said, "Come in."

A little child girl stood before me, and breathlessly gave utterance to her mission—"Ma faither has the fevar and is deein'; an' mither sent me for an auld sark and a nicht-cap tae streik him wi'. His ain's a' tore."

Greatly shocked by the message, I asked who was her mother.

"Ye'll no ken her, maybe; faither's Wee Mannie Monsie."

The things she wanted were given to the child; but the man died not till the second day thereafter. Many weeks passed before I got the picture of misery presented by that most pitiful embassy erased from my mind. Now the mother was dead also.

While I was puzzling myself as to what employment could be provided for Kate, by which she might earn a living, however humble, I learned that she had already set to work, and was earning something. Morning, noon, and evening, saw her hastening to distant hill-sides and woods, and hurrying back with large loads of brushwood and heather and ferns. Some she used as firewood, more she sold, receiving a few pence for her load of branches of firewood, or of ferns for bedding cattle or pigs, and earning, I was assured, what would certainly keep the souls and bodies of them together. I saw that the poor girl's happiness was best consulted by letting her take her own course. I therefore contented myself by seeing Widow Ferguson, the old woman who lived "but and ben" with Kate and the two children,

and her I enjoined to instantly acquaint me if it should appear that their supply of food ran short.

"Oh, sir!" said the old woman, "She's a eident, thouchtfu' cretar, yon Kate, an' a cleanly. She redd oot the haill place, and biggit a fresh bed wi' heather an' brackens; an' she loos the bairns mortal. Oh, but she's a strange cretar!"

I went into Kate's room. It was swept and thoroughly clean—table, stools, and all were clean and white. Standing at the end of the table was Kate, her face lighted up with an intense look of pleasure, while on each side of the table stood one of the children, with cheerful face and bright eyes. Each had a long horn spoon, and was busily supping porridge from an earthenware platter in the centre of the table. As I entered, the old perplexed look came back to Kate's face, and with more readiness of speech than she showed on my former visit, she said, "No yet."

She thought I came for the money. I sat down, saying, "I jist cam' in tae speir for ye. Maybe ye're needin' a shilling or twa till ye get regular wark."

"Frien'," was all she said; but she lifted the lid of a small box, scarcely twice the size of a lady's bonnet-box. It contained some meal. She took some money from the pocket of her frock, and showed four shillings and several pence; and she pointed to three heather-basses or mats in a corner, her own work, ready for sale. Then I got up, saying, "Ye'll do bravely, my lassie."

And she said, "Weel, weel then," and resumed her

position of delight at the table, where the young ones were still feeding; and so I left her.

The two little ones were totally unlike their eldest sister. When I had known Kate for long years, I came to perceive lines of pleasantness in her face, and a family resemblance to the younger children; but in truth, these were not to be noticed at once. The little ones were positively pretty, and looked so notwithstanding their tattered clothing. The little girl Bella was ten years old; Bob, the boy, was seven. They were bright-eyed, intelligent, and chatty. No one would have imagined they were children of the same parents as Kate; but such diversities do occur in nature. And Kate was very fond of them, amply supplying to them the love of father and mother and sister in one. She toiled for them incessantly, and turned the most unlikely things to money.

About a couple of months after the mother's death, and while the villagers were looking on her exertions with amazement, it was rumoured that Kate had bought an old hand-pick and a hatchet, and all were wondering what she was to do with such unwomanly tools. Every morning for a week she started with these weapons on her shoulder, and returned not till night; and during these long days her sole food was a piece of oat-cake, with water from the brook. But she returned one night accompanied by a cart loaded with pine roots, so many that her little room was filled almost to the roof, and almost altogether. These roots she taught the children

to split up with wedges, while she was absent at other work, and in the following winter she realised a handsome sum by the sale of the splinters, which the poorer villagers bought, as, being full of resin, they burned with much flame, and so supplied a flickering light at their firesides. They were purchased in more comfortable houses as well, being very convenient for the lighting of fires. In splitting up this wood, the boy Bob got his thumb rather severely bruised. When Kate came home and saw the injury, she was like to go frantic. She first fell to kissing him, then she cried over him. Then she took the notion, "What if it'll no heal?" and she went raving about until Dr. Blake heard of her distress, and dressed the wound, and soothed poor Kate. The doctor told me that before he came away, she said "frien'," and "weel, weel, then," which I assured him were certain symptoms of future amity.

Kate went to harvest work, and wrought "by the thrieve;" that is, her payment corresponded to the number of sheaves which she cut down; and her unflinching industry, notwithstanding her heavy frame, enabled her to make more than ordinary wages. After harvest she came to me to repay the five shillings. I urged her to keep it as a present to the little ones, but she said, "Na, na, frien'; I can wark for them;" and she insisted on my taking the money.

I offered her a glass of wine, but this she very decidedly refused, saying, "Na, na, na," as if it had been

Dr. Blake's physic I had tendered to her. Then she went away, saying, "Good-bye, frien'."

While Blake was attending to the boy's thumb, I made him suggest that the little ones should go to school. Kate agreed to it with some hesitation. Blake said that he and I would pay the school fees; but Kate said, "Na, na, frien'."

My sister, however, sewed a frock for Bella, and I got Durrand, the tailor, to break down some old clothes and to make up a jacket and trousers for Bob; and in Kate's absence the little people were dressed in these garments. Widow Ferguson, their neighbour, told me that Kate "made a great clamour when she cam' hame and found them sae dressit, mair noise than e'er she made, exceptin' whan Bob hurt his thoom."

She was for stripping off the clothes then and there, protesting, "I'm no a beggar." But the children cried, and explained that it was "the frien's" did it, and that their "auld duds" had been carried away.

At length, when the bairns had cried much, Kate admitted that "it was frien' like;" and the row stopped, and Kate said, "Weel, weel, then."

The children went to school, and Bob was a clever boy and apt at his lessons, although a rambling lad. Bella was attentive, and also prompt to learn, and a lively lassie, but douce and discreet beyond her years. So when Bob one day played truant and went off to glean in the corn-fields, Bella told Kate when she came home at night, and Kate sat down on her stool and

began to cry. Then the little boy, who had been standing glumly at the back of the door, came to her and put his little arms round her neck, saying, "Kate, dinna greet, an' I'll ne'er dae it again;" and he also began to whine and howl more than if the strong girl had whipped him. Kate had to kiss him and fondle him in that great bosom of hers before she got him quieted, and prevailed on to take the porridge that she had prepared for his supper. Bob never "flee'd the schule" again.

As Martinmas approached, I spoke to the man who owned the bothy inhabited by the Roses, telling him I would pay the rent.

"She's a queer lass, yon Kate," said he. "She wunna be in debt ony way. She cam' tae me hinner end o' hairst, an' pay'd down the rent, the haill twenty-five shillings, an' made sure o' the bit placie for anither year, saying she wus gain tae wark reglar wi' Maister Massón at the Bught. She's a warkin' creatar', sir."

In fact, the man was right. Kate was fully equal to her undertaking to fend for and fence the little household that God had left to her charge; and she did it, working with a singleness of heart and purpose, and a steadiness of aim and end, that were truly wonderful. Of course, she was a special woman, for woman she looked; one of the "characters" of the village, for whom the elder people all had a kindly greeting as she passed to her daily toil or from it, for her labour of love commended itself to every heart possessed of ordinary sym-

pathies. Even those Arabs, the village boys, in whom the exhibition of kindly affection is apt to produce derision, had a kind of reverence for Kate, and did not molest her in her ways.

So the days and the seasons revolved, and Kate toiled through winter's storm and summer's heat, and perhaps for her gross frame the latter was the severer season of the two. But the children grew, and Bella was now a pretty lassie of fourteen years, of a comeliness surpassing most of the village children. Already all or most part of the care of the house indoors devolved on her. She kept it swept and garnished. Kate had gradually added some bits of furniture to its plenishing—a dresser, three deal chairs, and a dish-rack, in the shelves of which last stood the few bowls and plates which constituted their humble stock of crockery. All was clean and bright. Bella also did the cooking of the porridge and the making of the brose, and had Kate's meals ready against her outgoing and incoming. And Kate used to reward her for her unfailing attention in this by a display of love and show of pleasure, just as if little Bella did all the bread winning, and as if she, Kate, were entirely dependent on her. The little girl had her schoolboy sweethearts, too; and I have observed that schoolboys do not often make distinctions of wealth or rank in their boyish loves, and prefer a pretty face and neatness to better clothing and plain features, and "pride," as they call it. Chief candidates for her favour were, Master Jack Watson, son

of a farmer at Nether Howe ; Jamie Robertson, a village boy ; and George M'Gregor, the weaver's son. The little girl, with precocious coquetry, made game of the weaver's boy, and treated him very lightly ; but she kept her preference, if she had any, for either of the two others, "a secret" from them. I believe that she once whispered to Kate that Jack Watson was her sweetheart, whereupon Kate suddenly put the little girl from her knee, on which she had been sitting, and got up, saying, vehemently, "Na, na, na. Aye mate wi' yer equals, aye mate wi' yer equals."

It would be hard to say where Kate got her philosophy. Perhaps she had an instinctive sense of things that were dangerous, and thus naturally opposed them, just as she certainly had an instinct of love, more than human love, for her two orphan bairns.

And as the bairns grew up, Kate's love and anxiety for them increased. If they both were not in to receive her when she returned from her labour, she was restless and unhappy. "Whaur's Bob? What can be keepin' Bob?" she would go on crying out until the boy made his appearance.

One night he came in with his nose bleeding, and the din she made was frightful—"Wha did it? Wha did it? I'll fley him alive, the vagabone!" she screamed ; and notwithstanding Bob's remonstrances and assurances that it was all his own fault and got in fair fight, she would have gone to take summary vengeance on the first boy she met, had not Widow Ferguson and Bella forcibly

held her, so that she could not get away unless she was violent to Bella, which she could not be for her life.

And by-and-by came a night of cold and bitter showers, and before Kate came in fatigued and drenched with rain, while the children sat listening to the shower pelting on their little window, Bob said to Bella, "Puir Kate! she'll be a' droukit. I maun gang tae wark at somethin'. Whan am big, I'll keep ye twa i' comfort."

Bella said, "Am bigger nor ye. It 'll be my time tae gae oot first. I'll speak o't tae Kate the nicht."

So when Kate came in wet, and tired, and downcast, the little girl said, while she helped off Kate's wet jacket, "I'm thinkin' it's time I wus takin' share o' the wark, an' that ye was restin', Kate."

"What is't?" asked Kate, to whose mind the thought embodied in these words was entirely novel, "What is't?"

So the little girl said it again. When Kate comprehended it, her speech was most decisive. "Ne'er say that again. A wee bit lassie lik' ye gang oot i' the warld, mang rouch weather and rouch men! Na, na; ne'er say it again."

And she sat down and did not touch her food, until the girl, who knew what ailed her, came and coaxed her, saying, "Ate yer supper, Kate; an' I'll no think o't; leastwise no for lang." Then Kate ate some food.

Did Kate meet rough men in her little world? No doubt she did. Men who jeered at her face and figure, who had no thought or sympathy for the

great heart enclosed in that gross form, and who regarded her much as a beast of burden. But these she did not esteem the worst. For there were others who made brutal jests and spoke unclean words, and stern necessity compelled her to encounter them all. Can we wonder that she shrunk from the thought of her pretty and fragile sister exposed to such a world as that she laboured in?

In the spring of the following year Bella, being then about fifteen years old, ceased to attend school. The occasion of it was this. She had all winter worn a pair of old dilapidated boots, which certainly were no protection from damp or cold. But they were boots. Now the sole of one of them came clean away, and they could no more be worn. Kate had not the means of providing new ones, and Bella could not go to school barefooted like Bob; and therefore she stayed within doors.

When this had been the state of things for several days, Bella one night put her arms round Kate's neck and said, "Kate, I'm na gain back tae the skule mair. Ye maun lat me oot tae wark."

"Never, wee bairnie, never," was the peremptory answer.

No one can tell how long Kate would have resisted the proposal of the girl to aid herself by labour, if an occurrence had not impressed on her the necessity for it. One of the farm-servants at the Bught caught cold, and fevered and died. Then Kate was deeply impressed with the uncertainty of life, and was greatly dejected by

the insecurity of her "twa bairnies." It was clearly necessary that they should learn to earn their own bread, and so be self-dependent and prepared to meet the contingency of death coming to her, Kate. So with unwilling, shrinking heart, she said to Bella, "I'll no stan' against yer feein'; but dinna gang far frae me."

And all that night the poor woman wept and refused to be comforted by the little ones who were so dear to her.

So the little girl engaged herself as servant to the blacksmith at Howe, whose wife needed the help of a lassie for her cow and her children. Her wages were thirty shillings for the half-year, and a pair of shoes, and the blacksmith good naturedly gave an order for the shoes at once, although it was three weeks before the term. What a sad night that was, the night before the term. When Kate came in carrying her little pail of milk, and found the two children and her porridge awaiting her, she sat down and howled—"It's the last nicht I'll hae ye tae mak ma supper. Ye're gain awa' 'mang unkent folk, an' I'll no be wi' ye. Och, och!"

In vain the young ones insisted that it was the right thing; and tried to comfort her by saying that she should be thankful still to have Bob; and that Bob was not likely to leave her, as he might go to a trade and so on. They even laughed, but it was sad laughing, as they told her how Bob had made the porridge for the last three days, and was quite expert in bed-making and in sweeping the floor and other domestic work. That she ate any-

thing, was due to Bob pressing her to taste his porridge-making—"noo she kent it;" but I believe she slept not a wink that night. There were many tears before the little family broke up on the morning of term-day, although they were to see one another on the following Sunday, and although Howe was but three miles off. But when Kate's work was over that night, instead of going home for supper, she went away at a trot to the blacksmith's at Howe, to see her "bairnie," as she called her. Kate charged the lassie's employers to be kind to her, and blubbered a great deal; while Bob, alone in the cottage, was sorely puzzled and distressed by her unwonted delay in returning home. And this display of sisterly love did not lessen the kindliness which Bella received in her new home. Indeed, they were very kind to her; and she was good tempered and gentle with the children of her master, and merited good will. So time gradually soothed Kate, and modified her views of her relations to her "bairns;" and she relapsed into her ordinary life of toil and peace.

Bella got on pleasantly in her new home. No doubt a life of servitude has its irksome things in the best of families, and Bella's life was no exception to the common lot. Ready obedience does not come naturally to ordinary natures, and Bella was lively and impetuous. Yet she bore up wonderfully, knowing that it was matter of necessity to work and obey. Perhaps one of the most bitter things she experienced was this. When she had been there for a month, young Master Jack

Watson, who used to make love to her at school, came riding to the smith, who practised farriery, asking him to see his father's cows. He came into the house and spoke to "the servant lassie," and did not "let on that he kent her a bit." Poor little girl! how she was vexed by this, fretting against the chain of her servitude as if it marked and degraded her. Very foolish, no doubt. But it takes some time of hard work and contumely and suffering to subjugate the heart, young and wayward, and force it to accept work and humility as its portion.

Of all her young sweethearts the only one who seemed to retain any of his boyish impressions was the despised George M'Gregor, now a lad about eighteen years old. Perhaps this was to some extent owing to the circumstance that the pew in church in which Bella sat was next to the family pew of M'Gregor the weaver, so that the young people saw each other once a fortnight. Sometimes, too, in summer evenings the young lad was found in the neighbourhood of the blacksmith's dwelling, and this was not lightly to be accounted for, as he was soft and flabby of person, and usually not at all given to pedestrian exercise. In truth, and in her heart, Bella recognised the youth as a sweetheart, and now her only sweetheart, although with the bashfulness becoming their years and circumstances, the lad spoke no word of love.

Now it happened that William Durrand, the drainer, had work at Howe at that time, and used to get his tools repaired by the blacksmith, and the prettiness and simplicity of Bella caught his eye and fancy. So he

"spoke her fairly;" and finding that she went to the village church every second Sunday, he waited for her on the road, half-a-mile away from the village or more. What his object was may be guessed, for he bore an indifferent, if not positively bad, character. He met the lassie on her way, and accompanied her to Kate's humble abode, and went in with her and sat down. Kate took no notice of him, and did not speak to him, but set to hug and bedear her little sister as if no one was present. When he went out, however, she eagerly asked who he was. The maiden told the little she knew of him. But widow Ferguson came in and said, "He's an unco' bad fella. He mustna be lat gae aifter Bella." Then Kate looked very grave, and said "Na mair he wull." Well, on that day fortnight the man repeated it. He waited for the girl on the road and accompanied her home, and went into the cottage and sat down on the table. He was well dressed, and talked gaily with Bella. Kate stood at the hearth with a face like a thunder-cloud. To-day she did not fall to kissing her "bairn;" and, when Bella went up to her to be embraced, she dourly put her aside. But the man was scarcely seated on the table when the strong woman seized him round the thighs, lifted him bodily up, carried him to the street door and tumbled him down on his back. Then she shut the door and came in and embraced her Bella as if nothing had occurred. The street was full of people going to church, so that the ludicrous incident was seen of many, and for a week the

village and country-side echoed peals of laughter at "the dandy drainer's" discomfiture. It was averred that he "skaillit his Kersemere breeks, back an' front o' them." No one found fault with the stalwart Kate. Indeed, she was nowise to be blamed, for she was ignorant of what the world knows as the "rebuff courteous," or the "civil repulse," and half measures were not according to her nature. The measure she took was happily effectual. "The drainer" did not accost Bella again.

In course of the harvest, Bella was sent one night to the village on some domestic mission by her master, and she reached her sister's cabin just as she was going to bed. Kate speedily re-dressed herself in petticoat and bedgown, and, in the village phrase "was like to eat" the young girl with loving kindness. When they had sat for sometime—Bella chatting and Kate listening, and Bob, who was in bed and had been wakened up, chuckling and crowing—the boy said "Winna ye sleep wi' us, Bella, this ae nicht?"

Then there came over Kate a great longing to get her sister once more in her arms in bed. She got up and seized upon Bella, and with solemn voice said, "Ye maun cam tae bed, ma bairnie, aince mair." She would take no denial, although the girl said she was ordered to be quickly back, but she compromised the matter by agreeing that it should be "jist ae half hoor." So 'mid the crowing of Bob, and Kate's "hoo-hoo"-ing (her common sound of pleasure), the girls undressed, and lay down. Then there was a moment's silence, and they, poor

tired people! all fell fast asleep. They slept until Bella awoke with a start to recall the state of matters. It was black night, and the peat fire had burnt down to ashes, and the lassie, not knowing how long she had slept, was distressed. In reality they had not slept many minutes. They got up and redressed, and Kate went with her bairnie all the way to her master's house prepared to explain the delay. What was their surprise to be greeted with "Hey, Bella, ye're quick back." So it was, their sleep notwithstanding, for they had hurried over the road. Then Bella must go down the road a piece with Kate on her homeward way, and lamented her sister's long walk and fatigue. "I'd gang twice as far tae hae ye in ma airms, ma bairnie," said the great woman as they parted.

On the term day Bella came to Kate with thirty shillings in her hand, and delivered the money to her. It was the first of her earnings, almost the first she ever had handled. She was in great spirits. "I'm na gain tae coff a thing wi't," said she, "Sae it 'll pay the rent."

"It's peyed," said Kate. "We maun buy some claes for ye, bairnie."

Indeed, the little girl's clothes were of the poorest. She had never had bonnet, nor shawl, nor jacket, and her underclothing was scanty enough. Yet she resisted the proposal to buy clothes with her wages, because Kate "haed mair need." But the big sister prevailed. Clothes were to be bought, and then came a serious deliberation as to what the clothes should be, for the great

need, and the little sum for disposal, made the matter of selection difficult. At length it was settled. Cloth for a black lustre jacket, a grey wincey skirt, "plaiding" for a petticoat, and a black straw bonnet with blue riband, consumed almost a pound of the poor little earnings. Then the girl said—"I beet tae gie somethin' tae Bob. Shoon's best. He haes maist need o' shoon." So a pair of shoes were purchased for the boy at a cost of seven shillings and sixpence. Thus the money was dissipated, for the little balance was barely enough to pay for the making-up of the things. But how exultantly Kate cried out, when, a fortnight later, she next saw Bella in all the glory of her new clothes, "Ye're braw! ye're braw! ye're a leddy!" But the poor thing might have perished with her thin lustre boddice, had not her mistress kindly given her an old body of worsted stuff to wear underneath it.

CHAPTER II.

AT Whitsunday following Bella found a better situation as domestic servant in the family of Mr. Morris at the Lowes; and Kate, who never would have dreamed of leaving the service which she had first entered, was thereby induced to quit the Bught, and she also fee-ed herself at the Lowes as a field-worker, so that her sisterly love was daily satisfied by the sight of her "dear bairn." So she still persisted in calling Bella, although Bella was fully six inches taller than herself, and a girl so pretty and tidy that the lads of the country round turned admiring eyes to her. Bob, now thirteen, still attended school, still swept the room and made the porridge; and he was, I learned, an attentive scholar, a fair writer, and counted well; a fine-looking boy, and full of domestic love. Kate was very proud of him, and delighted, to the extent of her humble means, to provide him with clothing, and to wash and, in her rough way, to darn and mend for him. It was a pleasant June for them all that first June at the Lowes. Almost every night the youngster, his lessons learned, and the porridge-pan boiling, started for the Lowes to get a sight of Bella, and to return with Kate. And many "a piece," more or less dainty, the kindly Mrs. Morris made him eat, while she added to his stock of clothing by gifts of her son's old things; and their lowly happiness seemed unmixed.

But such sunshine could not be for ever. Before long a cloud cast its shadow on Bella; a dark shadow, although it fortunately passed away, and at first she did not know it was a shadow. The way of it was this. At the mid-summer market at the village some tipsy lads took to violent courses, frightening the women, and beating and dispersing the men. Bella was at the fair, in charge of a cart with butter from the Lowes, there exposed to sale. She was alone in charge of it, sitting in the cart in the square. Around her came the wild lads and seized the cart, and set to drag it through the crowd. She wished to leap down, but with oaths and ill words they forced her to sit still, with the tears coursing down her cheeks. In the distance she saw George M'Gregor running away. Then a handsome lad came along, dressed in fustian, bearing a stout staff, and he stood before the disorderly gang and shouted "Set doun the cairt."

"No for ye, Wuddy Tam," said the foremost; but no sooner had he said it than he went to the ground, struck down by the young man's staff."

"Set doun the cairt," he said again, and the cart was set down; but instantly half-a-dozen men had closed with him, and clenched half-a-dozen sticks at his head. With ready fence and heavy blows he sent two of his assailants to the green; but then women and men rushed in, and the combat ended.

"Ye're a fearless creatar, Tam," said some; "ye're a' bluidy," said others, for the sticks had come in contact with Tam's head.

But he said, "Fetch the cairt back tae the square, men; the skemps daurna touch it agen;" and he walked by the cart-side while it was being replaced, and spoke cheerfully to Bella while she thanked him. Bella thought she had never seen any man half so heroic and chivalrous. "Yon brave chiel," she said to herself over and over again. "Wus ony ever lik' him. He laid aboot him lik' a lion." So the young man was photographed on her heart—the bravest of the brave, noble, lion-like. What did the little girl know of lions?

Who was Wuddy Tam? If you had inquired in the wide country round, I fear you would have heard little good of him. Indeed, Thomas Fraser bore a very bad character. The son of a crofter in the distant braes, he wrought on his father's land when it pleased him; and when it did not please him to work, he went idle. Strong, active, inured to climb hill and rock, he was one of the most daring, active, agile men of the district. A crack shot at the Christmas shooting-matches, swift of foot beyond any at the castle games at "harvest," he could put the stone and hammer further than any man of his years, and was envied of all the young men round. Need I say that he had been twice prosecuted for poaching, and was regarded by the gamekeepers as an extremely dangerous man. I believe no man to be utterly depraved; neither was Wuddy Tam, who had a kindly heart and generous nature, sadly misdirected, but which erred more through spontaneous ebullition than mental depravity. As for shooting a pheasant, if a man can handle a gun, I don't

see much moral wrong in that, although the professional poacher is certainly a bad man. Meantime, he grieved the hearts of his parents, humble and godly persons, and was universally regarded as a black sheep, and a sad discredit to the fold that owned him. Such was the man whose image was impressed on Bella's heart.

The daisies had folded their cups, the singing birds were silent and abed, the wakeful dove alone made thrilling plaint to his mate in distant dell, the voice of the tumbling rill filled the air with softened lullaby. It was a summer twilight a few nights after that market-day, and Bella was going to a grass field near the house to milk a cow, whose milk was specially appropriated to the wants of the house. She was not happy. She had now been two months at the Lowes; and still, in her want of knowledge and inexperience in the work of a better class of house, she was making mistakes and blunders and suffering rebukes. This day she had been more stupid than usual, and her mistress proportionably cross and sharp. So the girl walked through the dewy pasture, sad of heart, sorely feeling her ignorance, her weakness, and dependence. Suddenly beside the cow she was about to milk stood the person of Thomas Fraser.

"Can I help you?" he asked.

And it flitted through the girl's mind, how much the arm of a strong man like this might help a weak thing like her along the path of life. She answered, "Ye helpit me aince already. I maun thank ye kindly for it."

Then there was a pause, during which the lad examined the cow, and spoke of its qualities; and the milking being finished, the maid arose and took up the milking-pail, and stood before the lad a couple of paces from him. For the sixth time Tom said, "It's a guid coo;" and she replied, "Vera guid."

No one can tell how long they might have stood thus, repeating the same thing, for when lad and lass are willing to linger, very few words and no change of ideas suffice to make what stands for a sufficiently active conversation. But as they stood, Bella saw the stock of a gun protruding from the lad's coat pocket, and she could trace the form of the barrel underneath his coat. Then she recollected that her lion was given to irregular courses, and was suggestively near to the preserved woods on the river bank below.

"Whaur ye gain' the nicht?" she asked, before she knew that she intended to question him.

"Ye're seein' ma gun," said he; "I'll no deny it. I'm gain' doun to the wudd. Wull I bring ye a birdie? There's nane sae bonny as yersel in the haill wudd though."

"Na," said Bella, "dinna dae it. It's maist unhappy lik'. Dinna be breakin' the law. Gang hame, lad, Ye'll be better for't. Dinna break the law, an' disgrace yersel' an' grieve hairts."

"Grieve hairts!" said he, "what hairts grieve at the luck o' Wuddy Tam?"

"Yer ain folks'! It beet tae be, an' maybe yer ain hairt. I ne'er did ill, but I grat for't."

'O little ane," said he, "what ken ye o' ill-daein' or o' ill?"

"I ken it's wrang tae gae oot wi' a gun at nicht. Turn back," she said, urgently, "turn back and ne'er rue it."

"Wull it please ye gin I gae hame?"

"It wull that."

"May I come tae-morra nicht an' tell ye I did yer biddin'?"

"It wadna be nice o' me tae bid ye com'," she said coyly, "but I'll blythely ken that ye keepit frae evil."

"Weel, weel, I'll no finger trigger the nicht. Gude e'en, bonny doo!"

And he raised his cap with a grace and reverence such as lord might show to lady, and was gone, bounding over the pasture, and over the enclosure, till the gloaming hid him from her view. Could any thing have touched the maiden's heart more than this yielding to her will in the desire that he should do rightly? From that hour her heart turned towards him in love, and I fear it so happened, the rather that he was wild.

I fear there was a current of lawlessness in Bella's own nature which aided the growth of this unhappy love. For when her mistress found fault with her now, the girl would conjure up to herself how she would resent it when she came to be united to that bold man; and how quickly he would silence by word and act the speeches which wounded her. Already, although she had seen him but twice, she had, in heart and fancy, constituted him her lover, her protector, her master, in whom im-

plicit faith was to be reposed, and to whom implicit obedience was to be yielded. What was she dreaming of? A life released from care and drudgery, elevated by the brilliancy and chivalry of this wild man, in whose shadow she was to have rest, and peace, and light, and happiness. For she ignored the things she knew—that she, a poor, weak thing, ignorant and in bondage, was able to guide, and had guided, the lion-like man, from at least one deed of wrong. Indeed, she did not perceive that his savagery and wild-beast nature were mainly what inspired her love. She never asked herself how the lion might consort with the lamb.

For a week, night after night, the man stood beside the dun cow while the girl milked it. Few words were spoken, and no word of love, but each knew the growing love of the other. No doubt the words of love and vows of loving would soon have come, but their meetings were interrupted. For Mr. Morris, at the weekly market, met Jeffs, the Earl's head gamekeeper, who asked, "What brings Wuddy Tam every night to the Lowes?"

Morris, professing ignorance of the fact, was then informed by Jeffs that for a week past Tam had been seen by the watchers, and followed nightly to the farm, and after a time was seen to go home again. Morris had no sympathy with Tam, and was bound by his lease to preserve the game. Therefore, on returning home, he questioned the grieve, and learned enough to believe that Tam came to the maid. Then said he,

"Bring home the dun cow with the others;" and it was done. Morris also mentioned the matter to his wife; and she upbraided the servant, not wrathfully, but "for her good." And Bella stood by and heard her lion called "idler," and "vagabond," "a sly louper of fences," "a poacher," and "a thief." Oh, me! oh, me! Yet this very grave indictment of her noble animal had in it what deprived it of its sting, at least, in part. "A louper of fences!" Yes, she admitted the impeachment. Had he not, night after night, come bounding to her side, taking the five-foot fence at a leap? Was it a crime so to come to her in peace and gentleness and love? Possibly the whole indictment was the same. That he was not a confirmed poacher seemed proved by his desisting at her bidding, and never bringing his gun again. Still the words pained her, suggesting doubts of the man as her fancy had painted him, and whether her fancy, or heart, or love—I suppose they are much the same in such a case—was rightly bestowed. So she stood and listened, and answered not a word.

Kate was told of it, too, and gave utterance to many an "Owow!" her usual sound of pain, while she laboured a-field that Saturday; but she said nothing to her sister. And Sunday came, and Bella must go to the village for it was "her day out." She was going with heavy heart and slow steps, when Mrs. Robert, the grieve's wife, overtook her. The good woman instantly referred to the noble being imaged in Bella's heart. "He *is* a bad ane, a bitter bad ane. Never see his face again, lassie.

Villain, poacher, blackguard, fau'se hairt! Ne'er speak till him. If ye're a true lass ye winna."

"It's a' ae great lee," said Bella, bursting into tears, for her heart had been full to overflowing for a couple of days. "It's a' ae lee," she cried.

"Na, lass, it's nae lee. Bide ye, I'll show ye the truth."

They walked in silence for a little way. Then the woman said, "Follow me," and led the girl from the road by a grassy lane, fenced by a ditch and a birchen hedge, interspersed with the wild rose and briar. The brilliant summer sun was shining, and the stillness of Sunday was abroad on the fields. And as Bella followed her guide, she saw the yellow buttercup and daffodil in the ditch, and the clustering roses on the hedge. She used to rejoice in the sight of them. Now she passed them without pleasure, and a feeling stole over her as if she had left the world and pleasure behind, when she turned from the highway. At length they stopped before a tumbledown bothy, miserable to look upon as a human habitation; and at the door, in the sunshine, sat an aged woman—"Hoo's Rachel?" asked Mrs. Robert of the woman.

"On fut again," said the crone, "but nought left o' her but skin an' bane."

"An' the wean?"

"Weel eneuch; an' it's the imidge o' him."

"Haes he been tae see her?"

"Na, the fause vagabone! na. I gaed till his faither's,

but he wadna come in sicht o' me; an' he sen' word by Black Jock that we micht dae oor warst, for what cud we mak' o' him? The fause thief, an' waur than thief! I heard him swayre masel' he wad mairry her. The curse o' God an' ma broken hairt on him!"

A death-like sickness crept to Bella's heart. She grew pale and faint and cold; but she followed her guide into the cottage. On a low stool sat a wan and wasted woman dandling a baby. "Tell this girl, Rachel, whase is that bairn? It may dae her guid."

"Tam Fraser, Wuddy Tam, is its faither, an' a black Tam he is tae me."

Bella heard no more, for she fell senseless to the ground.

Her noble lion was, after all, a vulgar commonplace brute. Thank God! she recognised and accepted the fact. Yet the effort which cut him off and cast him from her was not painless; albeit her passion was of such brief life and slender roots. Providentially such efforts are not painless, for suffering and pain are the true discipline of the soul. Bella's discipline began then and there; and it was very painful to go home to Kate, pale and abashed, confessing her folly, and weeping as if her eyes were fountains of tears. Greatly Bob wondered, for he could make nothing of it, excepting that Bella, his lively, loving Bella, had fancied that some fellow, whom he did not know, was good, whereas he was a bad fellow. Why should Bella cry for that? "It wus only a wrang guess," he said, "an'

no muckle hairm in that." I daresay Kate's apprehension was little better. But she had a notion that it was "vera wrang tae be ta'en up wi' a vagabone." Yet both Bob and Kate soothed and comforted the sufferer with true, unselfish love, taking her tenderly in their arms and to their hearts. At length, Kate got her "bairnie" on her knee, with her head upon that more than mother's bosom, and, by-and-by, the grief and sobbing were soothed.

For it came to the little one as she lay in the arms of her great rough sister, that all love and love fancy were folly and evil, save the love of Kate and Bob. She saw the wildness of her imaginings, the deceitfulness and untruth of her heart. She saw, too, now afar off, the precipice towards which she, unrecking, had lately been wandering in blindness. So she shuddered at it all on her sister's bosom, until her golden hair fell down, reaching nigh to the floor, and covering Kate's rough skirt. Bob came then, and, grasping the dishevelled tresses, said, "I'll cut it a' aff."

And the young girl said, "Ye may if ye will."

"I micht be guessing wrang, an' greet for it again," said the boy.

But, indeed, so broken was she, so humbly glad and thankful to return to the haven of family love, that they might have stripped her of her hair and her beauty, and she would not have repined. For in that hour a higher and better beauty was overspreading her soul, in the loveliness of humility, and the acceptance of her lowly

lot in life, in a full sense of the value of the love of that humble dwelling, and that therein lay her chief good.

"Ah!" she said to Kate, "it was a wild bad dream I haed. Thank God! I gat oot o' it. I'll win ma bit daily bread mair kindly noo, an' eat it wi' mair cheer."

Kate dimly recognised that the evil was past, and thanked God, and hugged her "bairnie." Thus Bella arose and went out from them regenerated, and went back to the Lowes with a new, although a painful, heart; designing to seek happiness in the wonted ways and sites of it, and ready to listen to the voice of wisdom when it spoke from anything but her own heart. That henceforth she would distrust. Curious it is, how, by ways we know not, our minds and affections are framed and modulated for the distant future, and we, for weal or woe, prepared for destined ends.

But Wuddy Tam did not at once renounce his desire to make love to the girl. He hung about the premises, and Bella was told that if she desired to avoid him, she must not go out at night, and as little alone as possible. On her way to the village on Sundays, she often saw him, but she always had a companion. Frequently on such occasions he joined her on the road, and, after an exchange of greetings, walked along in silence, until she entered the church or the cottage. The girl shuddered at his approach, and did not breathe freely while he was near her.

Summer was ended and harvest past, and our poor friends toiled on in peace; not greatly feeling their toil,

sweetened as it was with love. But Bob became restless in winter, and talked every day of "going to a trade." What trade was he fit for? He spoke to Mowat, the mason, and to Leask, the joiner; but they said he was too weak for their work, too young by four years. He "wudna be a tailor;" so that the only alternative before him was the trade of shoemaker, and a shoemaker he resolved to be. The wages were very poor. He was aware of that. Three shillings a week would be the average allowance for his five years' apprenticeship; and as a journeyman thereafter his earnings would not exceed ten. But the boy felt that it was wrong to be a burden on his sisters, and was ready to adopt any course of life that offered an instant way of earning even a little. It was consequently arranged that he should become apprentice to James Malcolm, the principal shoemaker, at New Year following; but circumstances intervened which changed the current of his life.

The end of December was extremely cold. Snow came down in drifting sleety showers, and at morning the turnip fields were hard frozen and besprinkled with snow. Kate must stand in the frozen fields and root up the bulbs, so that the cattle might be fed and the roots stored, cold, pinching work, but common at that season on all the farms. Kate's shoes, however, were ill-suited to the occasion. Out of toe and down at heel, they were no protection against the frost-bound soil; and when she got home on the second night of this weather, the great toe of her right foot was sore and swollen. By

morning the swelling extended to her ankle, and she could not move the limb without pain. Still, having uncomplainingly eaten her porridge at six o'clock, she was dragging herself to the door, intent on going to the Lowes, when the pain became so great that she could no longer bear it in silence. So she spoke of it to Bob. By the fire-light they examined the foot. The toe was blackened and swollen, and wellnigh as large as her huge wrist. Bob said that he would go to the Lowes and tell that she could not come. But this Kate would not listen to. She would "gang till her wark;" and so she started, escorted by Bob. They went out into the frosty morning, with its keen wind cutting through their slender garments. With much difficulty they got along the village street; but when they reached the open country, Kate sat down on a dyke and began to cry. She could not proceed.

The boy sped on to the Lowes, and the snowflakes began to fall, and he ran and leapt in the grey morning moonlight, and shouted "They are plucking geese in Caithness; here's the feathers." But by-and-by the whirling shower blinded him. He could see neither to the right nor left; and the cold wind cut his breath away, and he could scarcely face the tempest. Through the drift a man hailed him, a man carrying a gun and a game-bag well filled, asking who he was and whither he was bound in such a storm. It was Wuddy Tam. He took the boy's hand and bore him along, saying—"Whisper tae yer sister that I loe her yet, and that

sometimes she comes atween me an' the hares." Without the man's aid the boy might never have reached the Lowes; but at length, chilled and staggering, he got into the farm-house, and told his tale. But so severe was the storm that, although the boy cried as he thought of Kate at the dyke side, they dared not let him venture back till it was broad daylight. When he reached the spot where he had parted from his sister, there he found her, still cowering in the shelter of the dyke, benumbed so that she could scarcely speak. She had waited his return. Now she could not walk at all; and Bob had to get some of the neighbours to help her, and so she reached home.

The sore toe was the result of cold, a species of frost-bite. Dr. Blake attended Kate, and was very gentle and patient with her. At one time he feared that he must amputate the foot, but the necessity for that passed by. Two months elapsed before she could put it under her again. And during this long period of confinement Bob zealously and lovingly attended to her, although Malcolm, the shoemaker, told him that as he, Bob, did not enter on his apprenticeship, he must take another boy, and did so. Bob felt that his first duty was owing to Kate, and discharged it accordingly. Mr. Morris, too, was considerate, for Kate's usual supplies of meal were regularly sent to her.

It was during this period that the following whimsical incident occurred. Kate fell in love with her medical attendant Dr. Blake, and persuaded herself that

he was in love with her. Blake was a bachelor, aged forty-four, and in fair practice, and therefore matrimonially eligible. It was quite to be expected that his kindliness and attention to the almost friendless girl should touch her; but that her feelings should take the grotesque form of love is sufficiently singular. Blake told me of it himself. He said that for some time the woman used to welcome him on his visits, which were usually twice a-day, with the wildest of grinning, as she sat on her chair at the fireside with her injured limb on a stool, and that the poor creature made unnecessary displays of her ankle and leg when he examined the foot; and that she always called him "Ma dear," and "Ma dear doctor." But he had thought nothing of it, until one day, as he came out of her room, Widow Ferguson followed him to the outside, saying, "Yon's a puir fulish creatar, doctor!"

"Well, she's not a bright woman," said the doctor. "But she loveth much, therefore much shall be forgiven to her."

"Ay, that's jist what I wanted to speak aboot. The creatar's in luve wi' ye, an' tells o' it. Puir doited body!"

"What do you mean?"

"Jist what am sayin'. The puir creatar canna stop her mou' nicht nor day, aye crying 'The bonny doctor! the braw doctor! I luve him; an' ye see he's courtin' o' me. He says I hae a braw leg, an' I ken I hae.' The creatar may gang dimentit, less ye tak' care."

Poor Blake was sadly disturbed on hearing of this most egregious folly. Seriously annoyed, he came straightway to me; and, notwithstanding his annoyance, I could not but laugh at his tale. But it had a serious aspect. What was to become of the poor idiotic woman, if he discontinued his visits, and how was he to remove her ridiculous fancies if he continued his attendance? One thing was certain, the poor thing, crass and dull of wit, but with a capacity for love above women generally, might become totally crazed of intellect, might be wrecked both mentally and physically, if subjected to a passion like this. So we talked earnestly of the difficulty. Argument and reason it would be vain to use. Rudeness and unkindness were not in Blake's nature, and I have seldom seen passion extinguished by them. What was to be done? Had Blake not repeatedly told me that he believed drastic medicines efficacious to remove from the mind nonsensical love fancies? Now was the time to test his theory. Blake tried it; and drenched poor Kate with pills and black draught for a week, until Widow Ferguson declared "The nonsense is a' oot o' the lass's heid. She haesna said 'the doctor' for twa days." In truth, the dreaded affection was stayed; perhaps all the more readily that Blake aided his potions by a rough manner and much fault-finding.

It was during this confinement of Kate that a new friend of the family appeared in the person of Peter Crombie, cartwright at Lowestyle, a decent man and well-to-do; a widower, about forty-eight years of age,

whose only daughter was of the same years as Bella. The way from the Lowes farm to the village passed his house at Lowestyle, and Bella had become acquainted with Mary Crombie, the only child of Peter, and had formed a close friendship with her. One Sunday, as Bella was passing to the village, Peter came to her and said, "Lass, it's the Lord's day; but if ye'll no tak' it amiss I'll send some neeps and taties tae yer sister." The girl thanked him, and said such kindness would be acceptable; and the present was sent, and was followed after an interval by a quantity of "sids" (the shellings of oats, from which the national "sowens" are prepared), and by other contributions, all welcome additions to the food of the little household. Bella very pleasantly thanked Mr. Crombie for these kindnesses; and so it was that, when Peter saw the girl coming along the roadway, he often laid down his tools and went out from his workshop to greet her. Mary also confided to her friend that she was in love with her father's journeyman, brisk Hugh Cowie, "a weel-faured lad, an' a weel-doing."

One Sunday afternoon of this spring, Bella was in the cottage with Kate. Bob was at the Sunday school. It was just after Kate had recovered the use of her limb. The door opened, and Thomas Fraser stood before them pale and haggard. He shut the door and advanced to them at the hearth. The girls were surprised and got up.

"Bella Rose," he said, "I hae soucht opportunity o' speech wi' ye aften, an' been aye bïikit. I ken ye hae

been sairly pit against me, an' am owning I oucht to get few guid speeches or wishes frae onybody. Ma life haes been wasted an' waur, an' am seein' that misery an' wrack are afore me—that am gain headlong to ruin unless some luvin' powar stay me. For God's sake let me see ye sometimes, an' hope that if I dae weel an' recover masel, ye may some day listen tae me."

He spoke with excitement and with earnest pathos, as if his life and salvation depended on the reply, and thus he stood facing her. There was a pause, for Bella could not at once shape an answer.

"I' God's name, and for God's mercy answer me," he urged.

Then Kate said, "Get oot, ye vagabone."

"I know I'm a vagabone, an' only fit for an ootcast, as ye say, woman; but mercy an' kindness may yet save me," he answered very humbly.

Bella at last made answer. "I ca' ye neither ootcast, nor vagabone, nor na ill name. I wud that a' God's creatars were guided i' the richt way. I wad fain help ye or ony tae dae what's richt; but ye canna expec' me tae pleedge masel, 'cause ye hae dune ill i' the bygane. Come tae me whan by a guid life ye've earned a better answer, an' maybe ye'll be no sae muckle dashed."

"Wunna ye say mair?" asked he, nervously grasping her hand.

But she withdrew it, saying, "Nae mair the noo."

And Kate impatiently said, "Noo, man, ye hae heard it a'."

"May I sit doun?" he asked, wiping his forehead.

"Na, ye maunna," said Kate.

"Leastwise, gie me a drink o' water."

The draught was supplied him, and he went away. Next morning it was spread over all the district that Wuddy Tam and Black Jock and others had been set on in the night in the plantation of the Dell by the game-keepers; and Jock had fired on the keepers, and they were all in custody. How Bella grieved at all this. If she had held out a hope to the wild man; had she urged him to leave his bad courses for her sake, would he have done so, and been saved from this crime? Who can tell? No one can blame her, and she felt herself that she had said all she dared. But the vision of the haggard anxious face, the certainty she felt that the man loved her, and would have done something to win her love, made her sad at heart for many a day. The gang were sentenced to transportation beyond seas at the next assizes at Inverwick.

In March several of the crofters in Braes of Langrig came to the village schoolmaster, asking him to name a lad to teach their children till mid-summer. He named Bob Rose, and the boy went off to the distant braes to teach some twenty young people, several of whom were as old as himself. Bella obtained a pound in advance of her wages from Mrs. Morris; and, for she was neat of hand and good at stitchings, having purchased two yards of chequered woollen cloth, she made the youth a cloak, or what stood him instead of a cloak, for its

dimensions were only those of a tippet. She bound the neck of it, too, with gorgeous scarlet plush ; and in the hills, no doubt, this contributed to the belief that the "young schoolmaster" was a swell. Yet the boy grieved at his hard lot in thus being torn from his home, and many nights cried secretly, as he lay in bed. The schoolhouse was built of turf; the most rudimentary of seminaries it was, to which each scholar carried his daily peat to provide the daily fire. The teacher's remuneration consisted of three pounds for the four months' tuition, with board and lodgings in the cabins of the crofters in the alternate weeks.

CHAPTER III.

Two years passed, and many changes occurred; but none which much affected the lives of our humble ones. Kate and Bella were still at the Lowes, older, but perhaps not wiser; and Bob was still in humble ways enacting the schoolmaster in destitute districts, and sedulously "studying,"—grounding himself in various branches of education, in the vague hope of some day going to college and becoming a real schoolmaster, beyond which great position his ambition aspired not. Bella had often urged Kate, now that she was alone, to give up her house and housekeeping, and to seek lodgings with some of the village families. But Kate would not. She was not social, and was entirely satisfied with her life, lying down and rising up, and eating her food in her lonely room, resorting to many expedients for increasing her personal comfort, seldom speaking to any one save when spoken to, and cherishing in extraordinary ways recollections and love of her "bairnies," for so she still addressed them. She was very proud of Bob; and it was her white day when Bob contrived to visit her, on Saturday usually. Going to church with him and Bella was quite a grand affair.

In the September of that second year, the kindly Mrs. Morris died, sincerely lamented by her household;

and this affected the lives of our friends, for in her stead there came to rule the family an elder sister of Mr. Morris, an earnest, austere woman, who had little experience of mankind, and whose government was mainly remarkable for its aim to be methodical. Now good order is essentially different from unbending precision of order and work in the economy of a farm and homestead; the latter almost always resulting in worry of the servants and irritation of the mistress, which are not at all productive of good work. Bella, who was under the immediate eye of Miss Morris, came in for a large share of discipline, and it was not at all pleasant to her. Her household work, in which the girl had thought herself proficient, was not satisfactory to the new mistress. Floors must be swept, beds made, and rooms arranged, all in new modes, so that the girl had to unlearn much of her previous practice. And when all was done, there was often fault to find. So Bella had a hard time of it. One thing which the lady abominated was the presence of followers, male or female, in the kitchen; and more loudly still she denounced the greeting or meeting of sweethearts out of doors. It also happened that old Weaver M'Grigor was gathered to his fathers, and his son George sat in his place and stead, possessor of the same looms, for there were two, and inheritor of the same circle of customers that supported his father. No doubt he had to maintain his old mother and a younger brother or two, but there was enough and to spare. So George, feeling the manliness

of his position, was disposed to enact the man, and recollected his old flame, Miss Bella; and during this autumn he repeatedly presented himself at the Lowes. Now the girl tolerated him, even valued him for his sobriety and simple nature, and, no doubt, also, for his apparent love. Still he had not affected her fancy, and he did not propose marriage. Therefore she was heart-whole and slightly bored, and laughed when he protested most strongly. Love speeches ever sound foolishly in the ears of persons not in love.

George M'Grigor came to the Lowes after Miss Morris's accession to the government, as he had done for a month before; and when the lady chanced to enter the kitchen while he was there, she snuffed with up-turned nose, and turned back; and that evening she told "Isabella," for "Bella" was too familiar for the lady's style, that men, strange men, must not come about the house, that it was most unseemly. Bella said that the weaver "was an honest lad o' her's," that although he "hadna jist proffered her mairridge" he "was makin' up his mind till't," and finally that Mrs. Morris "nivar pit again' him comin'." To all this the lady replied that poor Mrs. Morris had been a foolishly indulgent mistress; that if she had looked better after the morals of her people, many things that had happened would not have happened; that it was quite unreasonable to make love while the girl should be working; and, in fine, that she must not. Therefore, on the following Sunday, the girl told George the position of matters, and

that he must not come again. If he had been a clever fellow, he would have urged this tyranny of the mistress as an argument why the girl should seek relief and freedom, and happiness, in his love and home. But he was not a clever fellow, and did not; and Bella, although she resented the arbitrary interdict, was not much grieved by it. The lad then took to visiting Kate, and so consoled himself, talking to her of the girl who was dear to them both, and Kate always welcomed him with her greeting of amity. He was her "frien'."

Kate, had ever since she went to the Lowes, called nightly at the farm-house to see her sister. She seldom stayed longer than a few minutes, and often only just went in and put her large hands on Bella's shoulders, saying, "Hoo are ye, bairn?" gazed into her face, and went off again. Miss Morris was, however, repeatedly shocked at seeing the ungainly woman in the kitchen; and although she did not express her displeasure in words, she let it be known in unmistakable gestures. But one evening Kate came in drenched with rain, and cold; and, after her wonted greeting, she sat down at the fireside and put her feet on the fender, effectually blocking up the fireside. There she was anything save ornamental. Bella and the other girls were standing about or at work. In came Miss Morris, who, seeing the huge creature, tossed her head, and gave utterance to a lady-like little snort. She went to the fireside, but Kate did not get up or seem affrighted in the least, and smiled the most stolid of smiles on the refined lady, and rubbing

her hands at the fire said, "Frien'." She had always greeted Mrs. Morris in this way; but, thereupon, the lady flounced away, muttering indignantly, the only audible sound being, "Indeed." Presently the parlour bell rang, and Bella presented herself to Miss Morris in that room.

"What brings that monstrous woman to the kitchen? She has made me quite sick. She must not be there."

"It's only ma sister, mem," said Bella.

"That is no reason why she should come there. Do you suppose that the kitchen is to be filled from morning to night with the families of all of you? It is most unreasonable, I declare."

"She haes cam in every nicht sin' I jined service at the Lowes, three years syn an' a half gain', an' Mrs. Morris wus aye gled tae see her."

"Shall I never hear the end of my dear sister-in-law's management? You must take my way now. That woman, that sister of yours, must not return again; and tell the girls that none of their relations are to occupy the fireside in that style."

"Ye hae the richt tae be mistress tae be sure; but ye maun look for anither lass by the term, mem."

"Such insolence!" said Miss Morris, but the girl had disappeared.

Bella returned to the kitchen with the tears in her eyes. The girls asked what the matter was, and she explained it all; but it was difficult to make Kate comprehend it. Unkindness of this nature was entirely

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novel to her, and her mind would not at once take it in; and it needed the tongues of the three girls to make her understand that it was ordered that she should go away and not return. When it did dawn on her, she got up and pushed away her stool, saying, "Losh! Losh!" and after a pause, "Cam awa', ma bairn;" and she gripped her sister's arm, and was for hauling her away, nor did she release her hold until Bella had explained that if she went then, she should get no wages. That night the other girls who shared the kitchen with Bella "gave warning against the term."

Next night Kate's plight was ludicrous. She found herself at the back door of the farm-house before she was aware of it. Then, recollecting the prohibition, she turned about and hurried away lest Miss Morris should see her, and fancy she had been within. She trotted off saying, "Losh! Losh!" but a quarter of a mile off, past Lowestyle, she sat down by the roadside, saying, "It's hard; it's gey hard;" and she sat there for an hour, I am sure. Then she got up and went home, and cooked and supped her porridge. Thereafter she undressed and was getting into bed, when she exclaimed, "Na tae hae seen ma puir bairn the day! I maun see her." And she proceeded to clothe herself again, from time to time repeating, "I maun see the bairn ere I sleep;" and so she continued to exclaim as she heavily trotted back to the Lowes. There the inmates were still afoot, and Kate, standing at the door which she dared not enter, could hear their voices within. She recognised Bella's voice,

and her footstep, too, as she moved about, and she said to herself, "That's the bairn; that's the bairn." But the bairn came not to the door. By-and-by, Kate removed to the kitchen window, where she could, in the light within and through a chink in the curtain, see her sister moving about at her work. How long Kate waited I do not know. Gloaming had long sunk into black night, and the girls had sat down by the fire, and Kate had begun to feel chill and drowsy before she said to herself, "She'll no com' oot, the bairnie! but it's guid tae see her." Then at length Kate went home.

Of course, now that Bella had "taken her leave," Kate must also give warning; and the sisters resolved to look out for other service near the village, so that, if possible, the happiness of seeing each other every day might be continued; and they did so, but in vain. Kate might have found employment convenient to her home, but she would not "fee" because Bella was not wanted. Bella might have had a suitable place five miles off, but her soul was bent on pleasing Kate; and, indeed, it would have pained Kate very sorely if Bella had gone beyond her daily ken. The end of it was, that the Martinmas term came, and both girls were disengaged; and, with a heavy heart, Bella had her little "kist" removed from the Lowes and deposited in Kate's bothy. That night, after paying house rent and squaring accounts with the world, the girls, between them, had four pounds all but a shilling. They had also a pickle of meal—just a day or two's supply, for Kate, in antici-

pation of the idle day, had half starved herself for a fortnight. They were not despondent, however; far from it; for their little fund seemed to them a large one. Was it not almost equal to four bolls of meal.

But that winter fuel was scarce and dear, and the girls thought it a bargain when with ten shillings they secured delivery of four loads of peats, for the weather was cold, and the winter, they knew, was long. Kate had gone out to forage for fuel, as she had done in other days, but the times were altered. On peat bank, and muir, and by the woods, stood spectral warning posts, bearing threats of prosecution against all trespassers; and from these Kate fled as if they had been pillars of fire. "I'll na pit it i' the pooar o' man tae hale me 'fore ony judge," said she; and so the quest for brushwood was abandoned. Then, in the long dark nights George M'Grigor came to urge his suit; and as he was both constant and tedious in his nightly visits, and as the girls could not altogether let out their fire while he chose to remain, his love-making caused a sensible diminution of their peat-stack; and on this point the girls being sensitive, I fear that his visits did not conduce to the progress of his suit. It showed want of thought thus to cause waste of their poor store; and at last Kate ceased to greet him with her theretofore unvaried "Weel, frien'." Bella, too, in her altered circumstances, became peevish; not that there was anything immediately to worry the girl, but the whole conditions of her idleness were unsatisfactory, save and excepting that it was

shared by her big sister. So at the end of a long visit, when George had sat till past eleven of the night, and was at length going away, and Bella went with him to the door to bar it after him, he having begun one of his love speeches in the doorway, she told him—

"It's a' nonsense luve-makin' at this oor o' the nicht, Geordie. Yer havers wunna warm oor hairts or taes; an' it's hard on oor wee stack o' peats; an' I wish ye wud fash us less."

The lad said "Guid nicht," as he used to do; but, said he, "I tak' the hint. I'll scald ma feet the nicht I gang back."

So this expensive love-making ceased. But by the first of January their petty supply of peats was well-nigh burnt up, and they had to purchase another boll of meal. And, when a fresh stock of fuel and the boll of meal had been provided, Kate counted in her hand just fifteen shillings of money remaining. They then resolved to eke out their provisions, and to make a stone of meal per week stand as food for them both.

And through the cold weary days of January, when each little addition to the length of the day brought an addition to the cold, the girls began to pine. Want of work, want of food, merely a smouldering peat as a fire, all combined to wear them down, and to blench their faces; and there was no hope of improvement before Whitsunday. Then, when on a Sunday Bob came to see them, they made a sad pretence of having plenty of porridge and a wee drop of milk, so that he might not

feel concerned for them, and might go back to the hills, believing they were not in want. "It'll be time eneuch tae mak' him share his mite wi' us when we're a' run oot," said Bella.

In the end of January Bella lost heart and spirits, and was filled with sad fancies and thoughts of an early death. Hunger was gnawing at her stomach, and fevering her mind, and she knew the cause of her disorder. Then Mary Crombie came to tell her that now at last her wedding day was fixed for the fifteenth of February; and that Hugh Cowie and she wished Bella to be present at the wedding.

"An' indeed," she said, "faither haes a great wark wi' ye, an' says ye maun be bridesmaid, or ain o' ma maids, whatever."

But Bella answered, "I canna gang tae the waddin'. I hae na a fittin' frock, and ye maun let me pass. But, Mary dear, for a' that, I wish you life-lang joy in Hugh. Indeed, I ken ye'll hae it."

Thus she declined the invitation, for against the fifteenth of February she looked forward to absolute want grimly besetting her. Indeed, when she heard of Mary's approaching happiness, this was what came to her view—she pictured herself, in her diseased imagination, with her face ghastly, her form stretched, and her covering a shroud. Poor fanciful thing! How could she accept the invitation even from her only friend?

In a day or two thereafter came Peter Crombie himself, saying, "Lass, Mary tells me ye wunna com' tae oor waddin' for the cost o' a frock. Ye maun com'. The waddin' canna gang on wi'oot ye, I'm thinkin'; an' here's a poond tae gat the frock. That 'll dae, winna it?"

It ought to have sufficed, but no, it did not.

"I canna hae it," she said. "I wad fain gang tae Mary's waddin', but I canna, canna."

She was thinking how much meal this pound might purchase, and could she spend it in a new frock? No, no. So she sat down and cried, to the astonishment of her visitor, who could not at all understand it. He looked to Kate for an explanation; but all that Kate said was, "Weel, weel then, bairnie;" and the man went away sorely puzzled. He described the incomprehensible scene to his daughter and Cowie when he got home.

"She said she wad fain com', but she cudna; an' she grat an' she grat till my ain heart was sair for her; an' she looked sae thin an' white lik'."

"Tak' care," said Hugh Cowie, "that the lasses are nae in want."

"In want! In want!" said Crombie, "aith, that's jist it! An' lik' a gomeril, I ne'er thocht o' it! I wus sae thrang wi' ye twa, I a'most clean forgot the puir lasses. In want, they maun be! We maun send them o' oor substance this very nicht."

And the man would forthwith have harnessed his

horse and gone off to the village with a supply of food, if his daughter had not interfered.

"Ye see," she urged, "baith the girls are very prood, high-mindit lasses. Gin ye wus tae gang the noo, they wud tak' it an affront an' no a present. Ye maun let be till the morn whatever."

So Peter sat down protesting, "I wus aye thick i' the heid, aye thick i' the heid."

"It's better tae be thick i' the heid than teuch o' hairt, faither. Nane can say ye're that, ony gait," said the daughter.

Hugh Cowie resided with his parents in the village, and the existing arrangement with his future father-in-law was, that on his marriage, he, Hugh Cowie, should take his abode at Lowestyle, there to live and work, so that the father might have his daughter to manage his household as before. Once or twice Hugh had talked of the possibility of getting a settlement for himself, as the father-in-law being still little past the prime of life, it did not seem a reasonable thing for the new head of a family to be dependent even on his wife's father. In particular, Hugh had talked of the probability that he might get the business of old Paterson, cartwright at Balnabritchaig, in the event of that old man's death. And at all this Peter Crombie had grumbled, speaking of the hardship of losing his daughter at his time of life, but at the same time appearing not seriously opposed to it. Now, on that same night that Crombie proposed to drive to the village with food, and was induced to stay

at home, Paterson lay dead at Balnabritchaig, and Hugh Cowie heard of it when he reached his home. The business was well known to be a good one, better than that at Lowestyle; and, practically, it was in the gift of the factor, who had the letting of the premises, and might, of course, appoint whom he liked, as, according to the custom of this district, the leases of such premises are granted in liferent to the artisans, under certain conditions and irritant clauses. Hugh immediately went back to Lowestyle to tell the news to Crombie, and to consult him. He was surprised to find Peter not only not violently opposed to the proposal to make an effort to secure the place, but strongly disposed to forward it. Said he, "Gin ye'll git it, I'll see yer hoose weel plenished, lad; an' ye'll share ma stock o' timmer." Of his own motion, too, he brought Cowie that night, late as it was, to Mr. Morris, to secure his co-operation in the matter. Morris received his neighbour kindly, for Crombie was not only a good and honest tradesman, but a man whose conduct entitled him to respect, and he was reputed to have laid by a round sum of money. "Canny, douce, and 'sponsible Peter Crombie," were common designations of him. Morris undertook to accompany them to the factor next day, and did so; and Hugh Cowie became the new cartwright at Balnabritchaig. When the men returned and told their success to Mary, she was distressed. "Whatever will I dae? I canna leave ye, dear faither."

"Ye maun mairry, lassie. We're commandit tae

mairry, an' be gien in mairridge. Providence 'll no desert me," said the douce Peter Crombie.

Now the incidents of that day had been both exciting and fatiguing; but Peter Crombie, when he had got dinner, set off to the village, and presented himself in the cottage of the Roses. It was after nightfall, and he found both women within, sitting in darkness, and with minds blackened with despair, although he guessed not their feelings. The moon shone faintly through the cottage-window, giving just sufficient light to show the figures of the girls in the cheerless room. "Gude sake," said Peter, entering, "sittin' i' the dark?"

"Weel, frien'," said Kate, recognising the voice. Her sister was silent. Kate took up a smouldering peat, and began to blow at it with her mouth, making pretence to provide a light; and then Bella said half savagely, "Pit that doun, lass."

But Crombie took no notice of the irritable tones, and proceeded, "Aith! am a'maist in as muckle darkness masel. Ken ye what ma dochter's dune on me noo?"

Bella drowsily said she did not.

"Weel, then," said he, "Hugh Cowie haes got the place an' bizness at Britchaig, an' he'll be aff the morn tae tak' possession; an' ma jaud Mary will folla him, sune as they're wedded. I dunno what i' the airth tae dae." The women still remained silent; and seeing this, Peter went on, "But if ye lass, Bella, wad com' tae the Style, an' tak' Mary's place by me, an' kep ma sma'

haddin' thegither, I cud see daylight through it; an' its that broucht me oot this bauld nicht."

"I dinna ken aboot it, Mr. Crombie," said Bella. "It's com' gey suddent upon me; but I'll step up tae Mary the morn, gin I'm spaired, an' we'll see aboot it."

"If ye com', ye'll jist be lik' Mary, mistress o' ma hale bit plaicie," said he, getting up and going away. "Gude nicht, lasses; I'll see ye the morn, then."

"Tak' on till him for sure," said Kate.

When Crombie returned to his daughter and told her what had been his errand to the village, she snubbed him most undutifully. "Ye should hae left that tae me," she said, "I cud hae pit it richt for ye in no time. I wudna wonder though Bella wudna com', noo, jist for yer havers."

"Losh!" he exclaimed, "I'd be richt sad by that, for she's the only lass I wad lik' aboot ma han', noo ye're gain' awa."

Miss Mary was a sharp lass, and she thought more of her father's earnestness in this matter than perhaps it deserved. "Onyrate," she said to herself, "it concerns his comfort greatly, an' she's a true guid lass, whatever com's o' it."

Bella did come to her next day; and never did daughter more highly laud a parent than Mary did Peter Crombie. He was just and kind, and regular in life and way. Bella must feel as if she were going to a home, to return kindness for kindness, and fidelity for cheerful, friendly treatment, and a certain wage. The

bargain was made, and Peter rubbed his hands, saying, "I telt ye, dochter, Providence wadna desert me, an' nae mair wull it."

"I wish I cud bind her till ye for life, faither," said Mary, with a twinkling eye. Mr. Peter Crombie replied not.

And Bella went "home" to Lowestyle at once. Mary Crombie would fain have had her sleep there, but Bella could not leave Kate in solitude. And now solitude was Kate's only privation, for Crombie sent peats and potatoes, and milk, with no stinting hand, for his two cows had calved. He covered his kindness by quoting Scripture. "Can the children of the bride-chamber fast while the bride is wi' them?" asked he with a peremptory and domineering air; and, indeed, Scripture had before then been wrested to cover worse acts. Then there was hurry and scurry in dressmaking for the bride, and Bella sat most nights till midnight sewing. The bride, too, found somewhere the materials of a gown for Bella, who was to be bridesmaid after all. And Crombie, who should have been in great grief at the loss of his daughter, was really more active and jubilant than for years, insisting on seeing Bella to the village when she went home so late, even when Hugh Cowie, to whom he was entrusting his daughter for life, was also going there. "Indeed," he said, "I wad be lackin' in duty tae ma dochter, if I ran ony risks lik' that o' sendin' thae twa flichty young folk 'long that road i' the dark;" and at this insinuation he laughed very gaily.

Mary, tossing her head, said, "Deed, faither, Hugh may rin aff wi' her for what I care; I'd be best wi' ye, auld man."

Then the daughter would laugh, just a very little laugh, while her father actually looked grave at the words "auld man." I think Mary must have laughed a good deal "in her sleeve" on such occasions.

The wedding was celebrated on the appointed day, and the young couple went to Balnabritchaig, leaving Bella in charge at Lowestyle. But before they went, Mary took Bella aside, and, with much giggling, told her that she had no doubt her most excellent father was bent on getting married as quickly as he could. On this Bella looked serious, for she liked her situation, and had made up her mind to many years of quiet peace in the house of the cartwright. She therefore felt a twinge of jealousy as she asked, "Wha tae?" "What mak's ye think it?"

But Mary, instead of replying, set earnestly to laud and extol the many good qualities and the comfortable position of her sire.

"But wha is it, Mary?" asked Bella again.

Then said Mrs. Cowie, "Deed, or am no mistaen, ye're the lass yersel that ma dad haes set his hairt on."

"Noo, gae 'long wi' yer nonsense; but brides are aye allowed tae be daft."

But the bride, with much feeling, went on, "If I guess richt, be very kind an' tender tae faither, whan he'll speak tae ye. Think weel o' it afore ye refuse him.

I'm telling it tae ye noo, 'cause I believe he haes set his hairt an' happiness on ye; an' in leavin' him, his happiness is muckle at ma hairt noo; an' there's few by yersel I wad lippan wi' his weal."

"Surely ye're haverin," said Bella, as she kissed her departing friend.

Next day the douce and canny Peter Crombie said to his new housekeeper, "It winna dae for us, twa unmairried people, tae be in the hoose alane, for the 'prentice louns are na tae be countit. Ye maun fetch Kate till us. She'll be handy aboot the kye an' the oot door things, an' ye can mak' me new sarks an' stockin's." Having thought of it for some hours, Bella did as her master wished. Thus the cottage at the village became tenantless, and Kate and Bella at Lowestyle were as happy as ever in their lives. Nor were Mrs. Cowie's parting words thrown away on Bella, although Peter Crombie spoke no word inferring matrimony. What were Bella's thoughts? very simple ones. "If he asks me tae mairry him, it's ma duty tae tak' him." Very unromantic, but quite in harmony with what she had been and suffered. Her first love affair had taught her that quiet and sober affection, household love, like that of Kate and Bob, was the best love, the only love from which a poor thing like her could have real happiness. She had much respectful regard for Crombie, and she said to herself, "Gin he haed a claim on me tae luve him, I'm sure I cud luve him wi' a' ma hairt an' i' truth." Then, too, Providence had led her to him and

plenty, from deep poverty and privation. He was no niggard, she knew. If she became his wife, Kate had a home for life, at least for Crombie's life; and Crombie, if he died, would leave some means for living thereafter. Then he was very kind to Bob, urging Bob to come to him to study with the schoolmaster at the village for the time till October, thereafter to go to Aberdeen to compete for a bursary, towards which purpose Bob had now amassed some ten pounds. "Weel, I'll tak' him and be thankfu'," said she, "if he only seeks me." But the months went by without a word of love from Crombie.

I should say something of Mr. Peter Crombie's personal appearance. He was upwards of fifty, slight of figure, above the middle height, stooped a little, as men of his calling generally do, but his complexion was fresh and pinky, and he had hair still black. If there was nothing to allure, there was certainly nothing to repel the girl. Now, his daughter had guessed his secret thoughts quite correctly, and when she came on a visit to him early in May, and found that he had made no progress in his wooing, she set to tease him on the subject, and he confessed it. Then the wayward Mary (perhaps she guessed Bella's thoughts also) shouted for Bella; and, having brought them face to face, she said to her parent, "Say that forenent Bella noo, dad," and ran off and shut the door on them. I presume Crombie explained all this satisfactorily, for the other week I was at Lowestyle, and saw there an old friend of mine,

still young in years but a matron, very canty and cosy. She is the mother of three children, who are a sad concern to my other old friend, Kate, whose "bairns" they specially are. Mr. Robert Rose is a student of divinity, and a young man of great promise.

THE DANDY DRAINER.

CHAPTER I.

OUR little village is not without its examples that weakness or want of principle involves its own punishment. Vanity and love of display conduce to vexation of spirit as much as their more notorious ally, dissipation. A case, at once pitiable and ludicrous, is that of the villager, still named the "Dandy Drainer," although the designation now sounds only of mockery. He is a broken-spirited, tattered, cheerless labourer, prematurely aged, with nothing to indicate the pristine glories that won him his title of Dandy. I assure you the title was not bestowed in derision, but was eminently deserved and proudly worn; and when I recall the brisk young man, vain of his person, still vainer of his dress, excelling all the youths of the village in the village dances, challenging the hearts of many village belles, and a fair object, too, for their heart's affections, I can hardly realise the total failure of the man; and it does seem wonderful that he should have sunk into the creature you see, slouching, battered, and spirit-crushed.

His father was a tailor, who resided in a bothy in the back street. There, in the kitchen-room, divided into two apartments by a box-bed set across the centre of it, the Dandy Drainer of the future was born and bred, being then known as "Willie Durrand." There, at the window, in "the fire-end" of the house, was the paternal board, on which the tailor sat and stitched the village moleskins. There, too, were the household economy and affairs of the tailor regulated by Mrs. Durrand and her daughter, Margaret, nearly ten years older than Willie, the only son of the family. Three other daughters were "out in service."

The tailor was a thin and stinted figure, with a head completely bald, although he was but forty-two. He was honest, hard-working, and meek of spirit; in this last particular unlike his wife, who was large of person, and bold of temper, ruling her gentle husband and household with a firm and high hand. It was consequently no disagreeable period, when, annually after Hallowe'en, the tailor tied up his scissors and goose, made a small bundle of an extra shirt, some thread, and swatches of tweeds and moleskin cloths, and betook himself to a round of farm and cotter-houses, to make up the winter's clothing of the outlying districts, itinerating to the distant boundaries of Howe and Langrig. It was usually the end of March before he returned to domestic life to prepare his potato-rig for the coming summer, and to take his chance of the spring and summer trade. No doubt he occasionally came to the bosom of his wife and

family on Saturday nights to account for his hard-earned eighteenpence per day, which he must hand over entire to his better half; for so much, together with food and lodging, was the guerdon of his labours. This was the most jolly part of the tailor's year. He became crouse and cracky, told stories, retailed quiet jokes, and was quite a gay and jolly little man, when thus away from the influences of his own hearth. For Mrs. Durrand was a woman of religious pretensions, "quite superior" to her lot in life, very religious and very dirty, which qualities, together with her imperious manner, crushed out the tailor's spirit, stifled his laugh, and smothered his fun, quiet and sober at all times. Despite the identity of the nightcap which covered his poll, it was difficult for the distant parishioners of Langrig, when they visited the tailor on fair-days, to recognise their smirky friend in the grave and silent man, with the long and pinched face, who occupied the sartorial board in the back street bothy.

Such were the circumstances of Willie Durrand's pupilage, and, although the only son of "Deeran the tailor" (the villagers always pronounced the name Deeran"), the bairn was, without mistake, the most tattered little rascal in the parish. As the father could sew, it was no business of Mrs. Durrand's to patch the child's breeches; while the father, poor man, thought that he stitched enough of necessity to excuse him from amateur work, unless his spouse insisted on his making or mending so as to cover the child's naked-

ness. And the woman did not often urge this; for, although she delighted to go to the parish church each Sunday very sprucely dressed, she concerned herself but little about the tidiness of her home or the clothing of her children. But the boy must be indoors every morning and night "at the books," as Mrs. Durrand prided herself on the regularity of family worship. She conducted it herself, praying powerfully for grace to be bestowed on the tailor and her "olive branches," and for especial blessings on "our basket and on our store." But such is the godless and heartless character of the people generally, that they rather sneered at the tailor's wife; and once when she was admonishing a neighbour of the sin of neglecting private prayer, the woman made answer, "It's a' true; I dinna pray. Folk canna dae a' thing: an' I dinna bang ma man's lug, though I aye clout ma bairns' duds." Mrs. Durrand's sin of omission was notorious. I do not believe the violent sin of commission here charged against her. Her high character was enough to crush her husband.

When Willie was eight years old, and when the tailor in November was packing up his gear, preparatory to his winter's journey, Mrs. Durrand suggested that it would save something in meal if the boy accompanied his parent. The father's customers would not miss the boy's porridge, and they could be told that he was commencing his apprenticeship early, in token whereof he must keep a second needle ready threaded for his parent, and must carry the goose to and from the fire. Thus

the boy journeyed with his father, and the country folks who employed the sire, kindly entertained the son, nor grudged his little portion of food. Perhaps in these winters of itinerancy, the boy, knowing that he was entertained on sufferance, and appreciating the kindness of his hosts, eagerly strove to make himself agreeable to the different people whom he encountered; and thus the first seeds were sown of that facility of disposition which in his manhood ripened into want of principle. At anyrate, he ate and grew; and at ten years old, he was able with his tiny hands to sew a seam, and to realise somewhat of the real conditions of a tailor's apprentice. It was well enough while in the country, where the old women and farm-labourers praised the boy's stitching, declared it "wonderfu'," and conceded sixpence a-day for his work. But it was intolerable at home. Up at daybreak, and away with the barrow and the graips and hoes, to dig and trench in the potato-field; then, after the hasty breakfast of porridge and treacle, to sit on that weary board till night, stitch, stitch, stitch all the long sunshiny hours, excepting for that brief interval when "the potatoes being dune" and the herrings boiled, dinner was eaten in silence, or with religious observations by the pious mother. It was not wonderful that the boy fell ill before harvest was well begun—ill with pains in his chest and ribs, and back and limbs; so that his mother, who first tried to scold him into good health, at length carried him to old Gordon, the bone-setter, who, after stripping him and kneading him on a table, declared

that he had "the rickets," and ordered him complete immunity from work, and plentiful feeding with meal and milk. Mrs. Durrand wondered at the mysterious decrees of Providence which deprived her of the boy's work and earnings, nearly equivalent to half his father's, and she remembered the matter in the family devotions; but it puzzled the tailor how he should get more meal and any milk for the laddie. It was while they were pressed with this serious tribulation, that a crofter from Langrig called to get his Sunday coat turned and made up again, as his daughter was about to be married. He offered to take Willie, and to give him both meal and milk in plenty, provided he would tend the cattle on the hill-ground, "jist tae kep them frae trespassing on the corn lan'—licht wark that cudna hairm him." The mother now gave praises to the Almighty Provider; but the poor tailor would not accept the offer, generous and timely though it seemed, until after nightfall he had travelled the four miles which lay between the village and the dwelling-place of the bone-setter.

"Will it hairm ma laddie tae gae tae herd nowt in Langrig?" he asked, in the tones of anxiety, for the boy was near to his heart.

"Na, na, Tyler Deeran; it wunna hairm him a grain. He'll be a hantle the better o' it. God's air on the braes is better nor yer boord, man; gin the loon gets his bit and his sup."

The tailor sped him home, with mingled feelings of sorrow and pleasure, and next market-day the boy

went forth to herd. His mother blessed him very solemnly. His father put off his nightcap and clothed himself (he usually sat at work almost naked, saving his nightcap), and went out with the boy and his new protector six long miles of the way, and the poor tailor kissed his boy at parting.

Now it happened that the cows of the adjoining croft were tended by Maggie Scott, a little waif—for whom no man took care—whose mother, her only certain parent, was dead. A feal-dyke and a ditch, half filled up, divided the lands; and as the mouldering dyke and grassy ditch were the best of both pastures, it followed that often the cows in peace grazed side by side along the ditch, while the new herd, Willie Deeran, and Maggie Scott, lay lazily in the sunshine on the fragrant heather. And new life came to the emancipated boy. With Maggie he scoured the dykeside, and daringly harried the bees' byke underneath the furzy thicket; or feasted on the ruddy cranberry; or, in gentle rivalry, beat off the heads of "carldoddies." And when showery October came, Willie biggit a bower under the spreading brambles, lining its walls with heath and mountain moss, so that the thorns might not injure the little girl; and there, sheltered from the shower, and wrapped in the lassie's tattered plaidie, they lay in each other's arms, beguiling the hours in repetitions of the history of "The house that Jack built," and other fictions which the boy had learned while journeying with his father. Maggie was to stay

over winter "in her place." Poor lassie! she had no home. There was "greetin'" in the brambly bower the night these little people parted. Next morning before sunrise, Willie with his master was gone towards the village; and it was as he lay in the cart well covered with straw and a blanket, full of boyish health and spirits, that he came to the resolution, "A'll no be a tyler. A'll rin aff first."

Willie sojourned with his father in Howe and Langrig that winter, and was helpful in the sewing of corduroys and other stuffs, but in spring he went to herd again at Langrig at a wage of one pound five for his services till after corn-reaping. Again Maggie Scott welcomed him to the hill-side; and they persecuted the yellow yorling and peesweep together, and together they gathered the heath-berries while they tended their beasts. They traced out the linnet's and the mavis's nests in the whin and brambly thickets, but forebore to touch them. For Maggie said, "The auld birds wad gae greetin' till hairst, an' I winna dae it tae them." And the year and other years sped on, and Willie went not back to the thimble and shears, but in various forms wrought out the first grades of his apprenticeship to labour, until, being nineteen years old and a full-grown lad, he was engaged as a "horseman" on the Mains farm of Howe. All these years till now Willie had been either on the same farm as Maggie Scott, or within such a distance of her that from time to time they met. The gray cairn on the top of Dunarnie Brae had been their trysting-place during

one summer, and the rowan-trees in Glenlangrig had watched them many a night during another. For the orphan girl had "taken" to the laddie as if he had been her brother at the first; but, as her life expanded, she clung to him more closely with the love of a sweetheart, because she had no brother. The Mains of Howe was fifteen long miles from Langrig Brae, where she was to pass the winter; and when they met at Hallowe'en in the bothy at the Brae, she repined greatly at the lad's leaving Langrig. No wonder; for the hazel-nuts that she slipped into the fire, saying, "Him an' me," sputtered and flew off in anger and hot haste; and the egg-white in her glass curdled, and "wus a' ane clude." Could it be otherwise than that with swimming eyes she saw him enter the bothy; and must she not leave it, and go out to the stackyard to lighten her heart by her tears? She went, and before many minutes Willie was at her side and his arms about her, and she sobbed against his breast.

"Maggie, lassie, what ails ye?" he asked sympathetically, while he kissed her.

"Ma nits gaed squirt an' fuffing, an' ma egg was a' muddy; an' ye're gain awa, laddie; an' ye'll forget me ere lang, am shuire."

"Och, nonsense, Maggie! am nae gain' tae leave ye, lass; am nae gain' but till the next parish."

"But I canna win till ye, nor ye till me, Willie. Gin I had kent it a fortnight afore, I micht hae gat

some place nigh han' ye. Am rale doun-hairted on it, Willie."

"But, Maggie, ye see I cudna help masel. It wus faither an' maister made it oot for me; an' sax poon' ten's na tae be quarrelled wi'. It's a big rise by four. Ne'er fear! I'll win tae see ye, lassie; I'll luve ye the mair for the pairtin'."

And thus they sat, with arms entwined, in the shelter of the stacks of barley, and pledged their love and faith each to the other, "As sure as death," and with many kisses, until the waning moon gave them warning of midnight; and Willie Deeran ran his two miles home. What like was this Maggie Scott? Truth to say, she was not a beauty. A little, sharp-featured, pock-pitted girl, with grey eyes, turned-up nose, hair red, crisp, and curly, that might be tied up but could not be straightened. A keen and earnest temperament and a warm heart lay hid in her somewhat mean appearance. Such was the girl that Willie was thus pledged to love, and who certainly loved our Willie. He promised to meet her at the Britchaig public-house, half-way between their distant dwellings, on the following New Year's day, whatever should betide.

It happened that, at the Mains of Howe that winter, the bothy girl was a lass of some twenty years, by name Ellen Ross, a smart, large-boned, clean-skinned girl, with tidy and cleanly ways beyond bothy lasses in general. When Willie came to the bothy at the Mains his clothes

were very dirty; in fact they had never been washed, for cleanliness is not usually a characteristic of small farms such as he had been employed on. But he had not been a fortnight in his new quarters, till his smoothness and gentle ways winning the esteem of the bothy girl, she got hold of his corduroy leggin's and washed them in the burn, and gave them back to him white as snow. Gradually she washed all his things, and made him look smarter than he ever was in his life before. But at the first Willie Deeran was very shy of this girl, for the image of his red-haired one in the distant Braes of Langrig clave very close to him. Go where he would, work never so hard, still the pock-marked face and crispy hair stood near him. But there was no denying it, Nellie Ross was a handsome girl, with a good-looking face and black hair; a better-looking lass decidedly than the tiny little figure on the Braes. Then, how kind she was and how thoughtful! Maggie Scott, with all her love, had never washed his gaiters! But Maggie Scott had taught the lad one trick that now operated to her serious disadvantage, although it came of her love for him, and that was, that she allowed him, every time they met, freely to embrace her. Beyond doubt, a bird in the hand is worth two on the braes. So, as Nellie discharged kindly services to the lad, he would fain have caught her round the waist and kissed her while he thanked her. But the image of his red-haired lassie interposed, and he could not put his hand on Nellie—

not although the habits of the bothy were very free and easy. For Nellie made no objections to be nursed on the knees of the horsemen, as they smoked pipes at the bothy fire after night, although she boxed their ears and pulled their whiskers when they tried to kiss her. And the apparent innocence and modesty of the young man impressed Nellie very much by its contrast with the roughness of his fellow-workmen. She favoured him all the more that she believed him to be entirely innocent and untainted. As he was so quiet and harmless a lad, she thought it might be quite fitting to have him for a sweetheart. Her attentions to him steadily increased. His plate was heaped with porridge. His brose was plentifully mealed; and when she got from the cook at the Mains House a bit of "dripping," she baked a fatty cake for the youngster, and regaled him with it when no one looked on. Can it be wondered at, that before Christmas he had folded the girl in his arms, and after much ado, which drew from him praises of her beauty and her goodness, and protestations of his love, had got from her many unreluctant kisses? But even while he kissed her, the red hair and gray eyes of Maggie Scott seemed at his side, reproachfully watching him. The present enjoyment, however, was more than the lad could resist; and day after day, and night after night, he continued to pay court to the girl, who believed in the honesty and singleness of his affection. As New Year approached, there came to him more frequent recollections of the absent Maggie Scott.

New-year day was a general holiday, and the other men were going to the village to a dance. Willie had told Nellie Ross that he was bound for the Britchaig public-house, to meet some people from Langrig Braes, but he had no heart for the journey. His heart, the rascal said, "was noo a'thegither thirled tae the Mains o' Howe." But go he must. Indeed, he had fully considered the matter of keeping his tryst with Maggie Scott. He would fain have stayed from her; for, to do him justice, he shrunk from practising deceit. But what could he do? He felt certain that if he did not go to her, the impetuous lass would not stay at Britchaig, but would seek him and half-an-hour of love at Howe; and that must not happen, however unpleasant the journey to meet her might be. And Nellie had all her lover's fustians washed to the whitest against the morning of the holiday; and when he slipped into the feeding-byre to kiss her, as he set out, she had a large and gorgeous worsted comforter, of white, red, and blue, knit by her own hands, which she drew from the folds of her skirt and tied round his neck, charging him to keep sober and to come home betimes; and thus the lad set out on his journey most fully conscious of his duplicity. But, indeed, his heart was touched by the gift of the comforter, new evidence, as it was, of the superiority of his new over his unpretending first love. Ere he reached the Manse of Howe he had almost made up his mind to turn back and confess all his entanglement to Nellie, and to ask her forgiveness and her counsel; but some

lads came up on their way to the village, and he went forward with them dowie and down-hearted. He visited the dwelling of his parents, and stayed for half-an hour. The tailor was loud in praises of his son's appearance. His mother preached and prayed to him, and gave him a holiday dram, by all which being greatly enlivened, he stoutly took his way to Britchaig, now only five miles distant. On the way he tried to nerve himself to tell Maggie Scott how things stood with him. He felt the necessity and the rightness of so doing; but while he was yet resolving, half-a-mile from the public-house, Maggie Scott was waiting for him by the roadside, seated on a heap of stones, with her frock-skirt covering her rebellious red hair, and partially concealing her freckled face.

Now Maggie's love for this lad had not grown out of admiration of his personal beauty, nor from any sense of his superiority of mind or working power. It came of her days of herding with him in the Braes, when, children both, they had passed through several summers, together for the live-long day, in happy peace and innocence. It was born of association, nurtured by mutual vowings and pledgings, stimulated by fancies of the future, and by human cravings for sympathy. But Maggie, when now she saw her sweetheart after six weeks' separation, found him more than her fancy pictured him. He was clean. His clothes shone like snow. The gorgeous cravat gave colour and effect to the brilliantly-white fustian, while the polished black

leather garter of his leggins and his shiny boots completed a figure which overpowered the poor lassie. She suddenly rushed from the roadside, and, in a transport of love and admiration, flung herself with stifling embrace round his neck.

"Dear, dear Willie! ye keepit yer tryst! I kent ye wad. Dear lad, ma hairt's blythe tae see ye sae weel an' sae bra'. Hoo's a' wi' ye, dear hairt?" and she kissed him many kisses.

"Losh! Maggie, darlin'! dinna choke me athegether! Ye see I hae cam' back tae ye soun' an' safe. But cam aff the road tae the burnside, an' I'll tell ye a'thing."

He was completely upset. All his resolutions were gone to the wind. He called her "darlin'," and "dawtie," his "red robin," and all the little names of former love, as she clung to him on the way to the lonely burn, where he made her happy and proud with his presence and embraces for full three hours. He gave her the sweeties that he bought for her on his way through the village, and of which the little girl declared she would eat not one, but would keep them all as tokens of his sweetness till they should meet again.

"Na, Maggie; souk them noo," said her lover.

"Na, na; but maybe, as there's a gey lot o' them, I'll count them an' lay them by han', an' ate an equal pairt ilka week, till they'll last till the feein' market, whan I'll neist see ma dear lad again."

And Willie was so much led away by her manifestations of love and delight, that he gave her even the

German silver brooch, with glass brilliants, which he had purchased to bestow on another beauty. At length they parted, and our hero returned to Mains of Howe and continued his courtship of Ellen Ross. Could he help it?

I do not design to moralise, but the facts make it plain that our young rascal was plighted to two girls, of whom, at least, one loved him very dearly. It is no justification of his conduct that he liked them both, and had, by force of circumstances for which he was only partly responsible, been led to make love to them both. Perhaps the truest thing that could be urged in alleviation of his offence was this, that his own love for both or either sat very lightly on him; and that he did not know the depth and seriousness of a woman's love, when she truly loves. Thus he did not see the grievousness of his conduct, or foresee the sad consequences it might entail. Unhappily, too, he did not note the prejudicial effects on his own mind and character which followed this systematic course of duplicity, in the destruction of his moral sensibility, the weakening of his capacity to resist evil, and the strong tendency growing on him to do that which, averting a temporary unpleasantness, hazarded future and permanent evil. Verily, his sin was its own avenger. Meantime, gratification in the fact that he was thus favoured of two women, stifled all sense of the wrongfulness of his way.

A process of tile-draining the Mains farm was going

on that winter. It was done by contract. The nicest and most important part of the work is the laying of the tiles in the drain. If they are not carefully laid on even beds, the tiles are broken in course of being covered in, and a single broken tile infers the choking of the drain, so that the last state of the land may be worse than the first. Willie Durrand had been employed in carting materials to the fields where the drains were being formed, and had tried his hand at tile-laying. Perhaps it was some little neatness of hand lingering with him from the days when he plied the needle, that now made him a very efficient layer of tiles. The work certainly needs little more than care. But his effort attracted the notice of the contractor; and for one or two afternoons, when it was thought desirable to finish a particular piece of work, Willie was employed as tile-layer, by special request of the contractor and leave of his master, along with the workman specially employed. Thereafter it happened that that old workman fell ill. The colds of February had chilled his old bones and given him rheumatism, and he was laid up. Then the contractor applied for William in his stead; and finally, after a few days' probation, it was settled that another lad should be got for the farm-work, that Durrand should be paid off, and should thereafter receive two shillings per day from the contractor. Besides this, he was to remain at quarters in the bothy, and receive his allowances of food as before. Thus the young man began to earn quite a fortune—twelve shillings per week from early February

till late in April, when the process of draining must cease for a season.

In February "Tailor Deeran" was circulating in the farm-houses on the Braes of Langrig, and for five whole days and nights he abode in the same house as Maggie Scott. The habits of the folk were of the simplest. Each throughout the day attended to his or her own portion of labour; at meals, master and maid assembled round the same table, and at night they all sat around the same peat-fire. But in numberless ways did the little girl show attention to the tailor, and minister to his comfort, all which he accepted with the dignity and patronising air, which, as a consummate workman, he felt entitled to assume towards a humble creature like Maggie. No thought had he that the unwashed and untidy lassie had set her affections on his son William, much less that his son had plighted his troth to her. Therefore it was with unmingled paternal pride that he descanted of his son, as he sat on the top of the dinner-table stitching in the light of the small japanned oil-lamp in the long evenings—"Ye see, ma Willie's nae the same-lik' lad he wus at the Braes here awa'. Bless me! he's a tall strappin' lad. Nane o' yer fushionless loons, jist able tae haud a grip o' the horse tail an' pull on. He haes a' a man's strength an' brains tae guide it. That's what haes made ma lad sae muckle prized by ithers. Twa shillin' a-day forbye his pecks! It's no ilka lad o' auchteen, nor yet twice auchteen, that maks the same arles o't, I can tell ye."

The house folk were all seated round the fire, and from the group spoke Maggie Scott—"Whatna way, tyler, is Willie no' the same-lik' lad, I wunner?"

"Why, he's a hantle bigger an' robuster than he wus, an' he's weel pit on, ye see. He haes gotten a fine soot for the Sawbath. I made it for him masel', when I gaed hame last week. Show me the lad that can mak' twa shillin' a-day lik' Willie. I'se warran' he's a smairt ane."

And the lassie's heart was filled with longings for her lover, and for the coming of the feeing-market; and at times she was faint with yearnings for him, and would sit down and sigh, "Heigh-ho! that I wus near him."

At times, too, her love of him grew almost into ecstasy, as she recalled him on that frosty New-year day, bright in the sunlight and his snowy fustians. Then she would clasp her hands together, and think of his handsomeness and his beauty, and "Wus he no lik' a aingel?" she would ask herself.

Poor silly worker in byres and fulzie! What had she to do with angels?

Thus it was that as the feeing-market approached, a great restlessness came to poor Maggie. She could not eat. She no longer led the fun at the evening hearth; and her songs ceased with her laughter. Night and day the fustian-draped lad was in her mind; and her sole consolation lay in mumbling to herself the chorus of the old song:—

My fond lover!
Loving, brave, and true;
My fond lover
Aye keeps his tryst tae woo!

And when the day drew nigh, she became feverish in her eagerness, and scarcely slept for several nights. It was to be on Friday, and as she lay tossing in her bed from Wednesday night till Thursday morning, she made up her mind to pass Thursday evening with her sweetheart, although she should lie all night in the shadows of the corn-yard at Howe. What was it to her to see her lad coldly on the market-stance, where, perhaps, he dared not kiss her, and she could not rush to his bosom before the people? What she longed for was to be again in his arms and alone with him, and for this her soul was sick. So on the Thursday morning she asked her mistress to allow her to leave for the village and the fair in the afternoon.

But the mistress said, "Na, lassie; the dun coo's sure tae calf the nicht, an' ye canna gang aff."

"But, mistress, am boon' tae gang. I hae a trystin' an' maun keep it."

"But I say ye maun bide at hame. Am na tae dae yer wark, an' hae that baste on ma han's tae. Sae content yersel."

But at five o'clock Maggie was arrayed in her best frock and ribbons, and ready "to take the road."

Her mistress said, "The lassie's dimentit! See here, faither!" she cried to her husband, "Maggie Scott haes

gaen gyte. She'll be aff tae the market the nicht, though the dun coo haesna an hoor."

Ben came the goodman. "What dae ye mean, lass? Sic a thing as twa days at this time o' year wus ne'er heard tell o'. Pit aff yer duds an' gang tae yer wark."

"Am boon' to gang," said Maggie dourly.

"Then ye needna come back.

"Gie me what I wroucht for an' am content," said she.

"Na, na, gin ye brak yer term, ne'er a bawbee o' wages will ye finger frae me."

"Weel, weel; I maun face it," she said, and she went out and away.

"Gudeness guide us a'!" said the mistress; "what can hae cam ower her? She's no been the same lass for weeks gane. Bather her! tae leave me in sic a mess." Then going to the door and looking after her, she added, "Puir thing! I pity her. It'll be a rouch nicht; an' she haesna brock her fast the day."

It was ten of that Thursday night. The wind was howling in fitful and bitter gusts, bringing down with it cold sleety showers. At intervals between the showers, a hard, keen-eyed half-moon stared cold and bleakly on the drenched lands, from amid masses of black cloud. Then Maggie Scott, wet to the skin, knocked at the kitchen-door of the farm-house at Howe. A smart housemaid opened the door and asked what she wanted.

"Willie Deeran bides hereawa, am thinkin'?"

"Yes, up by at the bothy. Are ye sib till him?"

"Nae sib," said Maggie; "whatna way to the bothy?"

"Haud oot o' yon yett: gang richt throo the stack-yaird: loup the wast dyke, an' ye're jist until the square. But am thinkin' ye're sair drookit."

"May be," was all the reply, as the excited girl followed the direction indicated. A bitter gust of wind, prelude of the coming shower, pierced and chilled her as she passed between the gate and the stack-yard; and in the shelter of the stacks she paused to recover breath and composure, for in a few minutes more would she not be in Willie's arms?

"We'll think o' oor waddin' neist year. But ye maunna be dowie, Nellie, love! gin ye'll nae see me till the term," said a man's voice near her; and the words were followed by the sound of kisses.

What coldly curdled Maggie's blood, colder than the bitter north wind? The voice was William Durrand's.

"Am no in a hurry for mairridge," said a woman, "gif ye're true, lad; I seek nae mair, Willie."

And Maggie Scott crept round the stack with stealthy step, and she saw her Willie Durrand clasping a woman to his heart, as often he had clasped her; and she groaned aloud. The man turned and saw, and quailed before the blenched face, the glistening eye and dishevelled red hair he knew so well. But in an instant the moon was clouded; down poured the pitiless shower, and with a cry of anguish Maggie Scott rushed into the

storm and night. She ran blindly, she neither knew nor cared whither, and she felt not the sleet nor the wind. "I wish I ne'er wus born! I wish I ne'er wus born!" was the broken cry that sobbed to her lips as she ran on in the pelting tempest.

An hour later, Maggie Scott was found by the Widow Forsyth, when she went to fetch peats, huddled at the gable end of the widow's cottage, benumbed in body and crazed in brain. The widow, with the assistance of her only son, Jo, carried the girl into the cottage, put her into her own bed, and tended her for many days and nights. She learned the young girl's story and published it abroad. Then Ellen Ross would have no more to do with the false William Durrand. His acquaintances also scouted him; and he, disgusted, went off in quest of work to the county town.

CHAPTER II.

I ASSUME that life in our village resembles, in its main points, the life of the human family at large; that, subjected to similar tests, our humble ones sustain them much in the same way as their brothers and sisters of the great world outside. Then why did not Maggie Scott die of "a broken heart?" My reading would lead me to expect that she should; but I never met a case of this peculiar disease; and Maggie, certainly, did not die. She was ill, very ill, fevered, and occasionally delirious. No wonder. All her anticipated heart-cherished expectations of happiness were destroyed in that rude night of frosty winds and ruthless showers. She was ill, mainly because her life had been almost blasted by the tempest and the sleet. And when the more than Samaritan care of Mrs. Forsyth and Dr. Blake had re-established the conditions of life within her, she left her bed as if she were born anew, with fresh feelings, fresh views, fresh appetites. William Durrand and the past were only a dream to her, though a dream, indeed, which long left a wearying, disturbing influence on her awakened soul. She found work at the Whitsunday term on a farm near the village.

Five years elapsed before Durrand returned to his native place. For a time he had been a constable in the

burgh police force at Inverwick. Thereafter, he had resumed labour in draining. Now he came to us as contractor to execute the tile-drainage of the farm of Dell, two miles from the village. He took up his abode in the paternal bothy. He worked hard and steadily. He delighted in dress, and was, undoubtedly, the best-dressed lad in the village, when, labour being over for the day, he attired himself, as he regularly did after working hours, in his holiday clothing. He was tall and good-looking, and wore his clothes with a grace, and carried himself with a deportment much superior to the mass of louts around him. Probably the grace and bearing came to him from his instincts as the son of a tailor and his drill in the police. Vanity was his besetting sin. Egregious self-conceit girt him as a garment. It was said that he was backed in his contract by Thomas Balders, carter, cowfeeder, and farmer, one of the upper men of the village. At anyrate, Durrand almost every night was to be found at Balders' fireside, "newsing" with Balders, nursing his children, of whom there were three, or canvassing the merits and demerits of the lasses of the district with Mrs. Balders, a brown-eyed, large-mouthed, stout woman of thirty-five, untidy in her habits, and coarse of mind and manner, who suckled her baby at the hearth, and milked her cow in the byre equally as matters of course. She delighted in gossip and slander; and had many neighbours, whose pleasures lay in the same grooves. And Mrs. Balders seriously thought Durrand "an unco

han'some chiel," and frankly told him so. No doubt it was quite platonic; although she certainly winked and laughed, and went on with him in a way scarcely in harmony with the fact that she was already provided with a husband, albeit that husband was fifty years and upwards. She it was, who, admiring our well-dressed hero at her fireside, first bestowed on him the title of "Dandy Drainer," by which thenceforth he was best known.

Mr. James Wilson was tenant at Dell, a proud, stiffish, genteelly cold man; a widower, with an only daughter, Mary Wilson, a pert, spoiled girl of twenty, who was slightly deaf, and had a contorted spine. Miss Wilson saw "the Dandy Drainer" when he first called on her father regarding the contract, in all the gentility of his best clothes. Her deafness and her spine had both contributed to isolate her in a great measure from the families around her; and her father's coldness and stinginess had so far tended in the same direction, that she had, in fact, no female friends of her own station in life, and was thrown upon the servant women about her for sympathy. These women were unanimous in their praises of William Durrand. They gave him all sorts of pretty names. Indeed, his fame had preceded his advent, for the kitchen-maid, Betsy Morrison, knew him years before at the Mains of Howe, and could tell how he broke the hearts or spirits of ever so many girls. Thus Miss Wilson was almost in love with him before his appearance took her heart by storm. It was simple

of explanation. She had read a few silly novels, and longed for a handsome lover, and one had not come, and there seemed no likelihood of his coming. She was a strange girl; and at sixteen had carried on a flirtation with the boy who washed her father's gig, and jobbed about the house and farm. More lately, she had pleased herself with surreptitious meetings with one of the ploughmen, until the dairy-woman, who thought her prior claims to the swain were not fairly regarded by him, basely betrayed the pair to her master, and Jack Thomson was summarily turned adrift. For him the damsel was still mournful when the praises of Durrand were sung to her by the chorus of servant lasses.

In such circumstances it is not surprising that within ten days of the commencement of his labours at Dell, Durrand received a note by the hands of the kitchen-maid, of which this was the tenor:—

"Miss Wilson will be glad to receive Mr. Durrand to tea at 8 to-night. She will be disengaged, her papa being from home."

And the kitchen-maid whispered that it was from her young mistress, and that her master was going to Inverwick after tea that night, and was to be absent all next day at the burgh market. Durrand made answer that he could not meet the lady. Does this surprise you? Well, it need not, for Durrand was immensely flattered by the invitation, and would have done much to avail himself of it; but on the previous evening Thomas Balders had told him that he was going to Inverwick with

carts loaded with potatoes, and was to be absent till the following afternoon; and the drainer, in ignorance of the higher call which awaited him, had promised that he would call in to see "the childer'," and he felt bound not to break this appointment. No higher motive prevented the gratification of Miss Molly's wish. The kitchen-maid had brought him the note to the bothy at the close of dinner-hour, and after his men, having consumed their brose, had started for the field, and he was calmly smoking his pipe and alone.

"I canna the nicht," he said; "tell the leddy am ooncoman sorry. I canna the nicht; but, may be, it may soot her soon agen, tell her that, ma bonny lass; but, indeed, I wish it war yersel'."

Then he seized the girl and kissed her; and she, laughing, slapped his face and ran away. She made a most impressive report to Miss Wilson of the lad's engagement and of his vexation, and of his compliments and praises of the young lady's beauty. The vain creature examined herself anew in the glass after the lass had adminstered this fictitious dose of flattery, and anew she believed in her charms and was consoled.

"It is too bad, Betsy, to be disappointed. I always am disappointed, I believe; but I must keep up my spirits for all that. Betsy, see here's for you;" and she bestowed on the maiden a shilling.

Thus was the young ambassadress rewarded by both parties. But the maid's deceitful flattery and skilful management of her mistress came not of a cool, clear

head, but were rather an index of the girl's own facility of character and bad heart.

And soon thereafter Mr. Durrand did have interviews, first in the wood, and thereafter in the dining-room, with the foolish Miss Wilson. In her father's occasional absences she got the drainer into the house, and treated him to tea, and wine and cake, and such music as she could produce from the piano; and she permitted him to kiss her hand, and received his rough pretences of devotion to her, fancying she was a princess, beautiful and bountiful, of fairy tale, and that this humble devotee was the slave of her beauty. But Betsy, the maid, had caught the lad's fancy; and he usually indulged himself in an interlude with her, preliminary to his introduction to the parlour. He had, too, an uneasy sense of risk that the farmer might unexpectedly return, or that he might be informed of these clandestine visits to his dining-room; so "the dandy," naturally cautious, lost much of the enjoyment afforded by a fine room, and wine and piano-strumming, and a silly girl to boot. Besides all this, it was necessary to speak loudly, in order that the deaf girl might hear him, and he did not half like this, not knowing who might be listening and tittering in the lobby without. It really was a relief when, the interview over, he speedily found himself in the back-kitchen with Betsy on his knee. "Like mistress, like maid," they say, and Betsy did not belie the aphorism, nor enjoy

her lover the less one whit because he humoured the silly fancies of her mistress. For she esteemed "Miss Molly" a fool, whom it was necessary for some one to cajole and flatter, in order to prevent her from "rinning wud." But Betsy, more foolish than her mistress, believed that Durrand was sincere in his addresses to her. "Faugh!" he said, "leddies! wersh thewless cretars! I'd raither hae a winsome leishin' cummer lik' ye than the brawest leddy i' the lan'."

"Ye're a coaxin' chiel, Deeran. Wus that what ye used tae say till Nelly Ross?"

"I maybe said as muckle tae Nelly. It wusna my faut that am courtin' the noo. Some lasses can cast aff luve as lichtly as their shoon. I wus sair doun whan Nelly bade me pack awa'."

"Puir Bill!" said she.

"I'll no gang back tae that feckless gawky upstairs. I'll no be wastin' time wi' the geik-neckit wench, whan I ken a rosie lass o' ma ain 'gree. Ye maunna bid me agen."

"Aweel," said Betsy, musing as she played with his whiskers, "We maun humour her a bit, or she'll gang stark mad."

"She may gang stark nakit for what I care," said Durrand.

Betsy hid her face in his bosom, laughing at this sally; and Durrand had a tussle to get her head up to kiss the giggling face. So on it went; and what could

come of such folly but grief and vexation of spirit to all concerned?

Now Jo Forsyth, son of widow Forsyth at Howe's Craig, in whose house Maggie Scott had found shelter and nursing in her illness, was foreman of the squad of labourers employed by Durrand. Jo was a sober, settled lad, twenty-seven years of age, honest, cheerful, and industrious. Poor Maggie's story had touched the lad's feelings at the time—perhaps he had thought too much of it; and although he now wrought Durrand's work, and took his money, and was his foreman, he was a totally different man from Durrand. Honest and manly, of fair stature, stalwart and solid, entirely lacking in the versatility and readiness which chiefly distinguished Durrand's mind; yet, like the men around him, he had his sweetheart, being not exempt from the common weaknesses of our race. He had but one, and he courted her in all honesty and singleness of heart, aiming at some day making her his wife. No doubt his love had but little effervescence in it; but sincerity is more than an equivalent for emotion. The girl he loved was not of remarkable beauty, but she was lively, and had emotion enough for two. And very gently, even tenderly, but firmly, she repulsed, and had repulsed, her lover's advances, saying, "Och, Jo, lad! I'll never get intill the scrape o' luvin' agen. Ye ken what I mean. Brunt bairns dread the fire, and I'll no plicht ma soul tae man agen, though the man ye ken o' is noucht tae me noo."

"Dear Maggie, why shud ye say it? 'Cause ye met ae fause hairt, ye're nae gain' tae shut oot a' mankind frae yer ain warm breist.'"

"Warm breist, lad! nae warm breist hae I! It's a cauld an' brunt-oot ingle. There's noucht noo but dust an' ashes, whar aince wus heat an' bleeze ower muckle."

"Noo, Maggie, ye're aye talkin' o' cauld hairts, an' dust, an' the lik'. Ae kiss, lassie, an' a grain o' faith in a true man's luve, wad quick kendle the flame agen; gin ye wad only lat oot yer womman's natur', an' no keep it boun' up lik' a deid corp. Womman, ye ken that I hae courted nae ither lass thae three year gane, an' ma soul's honest tae ye; yet ye winna gie me ae kiss."

"Ah, dear lad, Jo! kisses are no for dry lips and used-up hairts. Tak yers tae some ane whase affection haes no been blasted lik' mine. Dinna seek me tae loe agen. I winna, daurna." It was Maggie Scott said this—the Maggie Scott whom we knew five years before; yet not the same. She was softened by the past, and her small, sharp face, and gray eyes, were almost prettily feminine. In better service than in former years, she had improved in her manners and dress. We see that the past still left its mark on her. True, there was no longer the active emotion—that had died in the storm and sickbed; but instead of love there had grown up a distrust of herself and of mankind, blinding her eyes to the offering of a leal heart, and making her reject a happiness for which her nature was yearning. To some

extent, too, her persistence in refusing Jo Forsyth's love came from this—that, on first recovering from her mad affection for the drainer, she said she would never love again, and she thought it a fine thing to keep the resolve, which Jo had more than once heard her utter. Perhaps, too, her nature, which was certainly capable of much out of the ordinary course, was now seeking vent, and finding sad pleasure in self-torture. However it was, there is the fact. She resisted and repulsed Jo, until the lad had begun to tire of a pursuit that seemed destined to disappointment, and with weary heart began to meditate its abandonment.

Jo Forsyth soon saw the entanglement in which William Durrand was involving himself and the two girls at Dell. A casual visit to the kitchen put him up to the whole matter, and he was filled with dislike of the Drainer's courses, and a desire to deliver the women from the toils which they were weaving for themselves. So one evening he loitered behind on his way past the house until he saw Betsy Morrison, and he said, "Lassie, am telt that oor Dandy Drainer's courtin' ye."

"Wha med it yer business, lad?"

"Nae business o' mine ava," he said, "mair nor ilka honest man's, no tae see wrang dune to the unwary wi'ooten a cry till them."

"Wha says there's ony wrang in ma courtin'?" she asked fiercely. "Wha are ye, loun, that speaks o' it?"

And Jo was forced to admit to himself that he had made a mistake; and he told the girl that he meant no evil, and in his rough way he apologised for it. "But," said he, "tak' care o' Deeran, lass; he haes vext a girl or twa ere noo;" and so he went his way, wondering at female vagaries and at his own rashness in interfering.

Soon thereafter the Drainer and Jo sat in the bothy after their mid-day meal, smoking silently. The workmen had wandered outside to whiff away, in the open air, the remainder of their meal-hour, and the maid, Betsy, came to the Drainer. Jo rose to go out, but the lass stopped him, saying, "Say yon noo, till Mr. Deeran hear ye himsel."

"What was't agen, lass?" asked Jo in reply.

"Shurely yer memory's nae sae short," said she, "or is it feart ye are o' the man, that ye'll no say forenent him what ye said tae me?"

"No feart," said Jo; "I see what ye mean. I'll e'en say it agen, lass. Am leavin' ye thegither. Have a care o' the Drainer. He haes vext mair nor ane afore ye, an' maybe ye'll nae be the last."

"Harken till him, Deeran! Wull ye let the lad insult me an' yersel that gait?"

"No insult at all, at all," said Jo. "Lassie, I am no meaning no insult, but words o' warnin' that ye can tak' or leave as ye list. Deeran's there, he can tell ye if I speak a lee."

"Whaugh! Betsy," said Durrand, "dinna quarrel ma mate an' me. He means nae ill, at least tae ye. Ye ken weel eneuch I hae been wildish 'mang the lassies i' ma day. It wus their ain fauts, though; ony rate, no mine a'thegither; an' that day's dune, fairly dune," said he, as, seeing that Jo was gone out, he wound his arm round the girl's waist. "I'm tae be steady noo, an' ever mair. Am pledged tae ye for ae thing, an' a contractor maun keep his caracter for anither. I'll daff wi' nane but ye for life noo, dearie."

"Dear Bill, dear Bill!" said the girl, running her fingers through his hair. "Am shure ye wull, am certain shure o' it. But yon chiel dinged ma hairt doon wi' his talk o' yer auld ways wi' silly lasses. But that pits me in mind o' ma errant. That daft Miss Molly wants ye tae tea, the nicht. Her faither's gane frae hame, an' she'll be waitin' ye at seven."

"Confune the thrawn jaud!" said the Drainer. "Am no gaun tae be makin' a fule o' masel, purtendin' luve till her. I canna dae it, Betsy. A'll no dae it. Sae gang back an' say I canna tryst her."

"No, but, Deeran, ye maun dae it aince or twice mair. See what she gied me tae speed the errant, a hale half-croun, nae less; so 'dinna tak' no denial,' said she, "an' nae mair I will, Dandy dearie."

Then Durrand said he would go to please her, and would please himself by staying half-an-hour with her before Miss Wilson's tea-hour. She then took her way

back to her silly mistress. Soon after Jo Forsyth came in and sat down, still smoking.

The men sat smoking in silence for a few minutes, when Jo said slowly, as he whiffed, "Ye're an awfu' chiel, Deeran."

"Hoo that, Jo?"

"Ye're aye entreegin' wi' the wimmen folk; gettin' yersel intil trouble, an' garrin' hairts rue their soukin' in o' yer flattery."

"Man, I am no tae blame sae muckle! The jauds come seekin' me. I canna help their fancies. If they're fulish, am na tae ac' the blin' horse, an' stairve while ma neighbour's rack's fu' an' welcome tae me."

"That's not it, Deeran. What I blame ye for is, that ye're a licht-o-'luve; that ye're every lass's lad for a while that is catched wi' yer coat or yer feegur; that ye hae honied phrases tae help ye catch them, an' that ye leave them in the lurch at the hinner end, an' gang aff yersel unscotched tae wile ithers i' the neist toun It's no fair courtin'; it's no honest ava."

"Hear till him noo! Ye ken naething o' it. If a lass rins aifter me, am no gain tae slap her face. We're commandit, man, no tae return evil for good. Leastwise, it's no i' ma natur' tae kick whan am kissed. What am I tae dae then?

"No tell lees aboot it. If ye're no in luve an' dinna tell lees, no lass will trust ye wi' ower muckle first, an' rue it aifter."

"Ye dinna ken them, Jo; ye dinna ken them. They need sma perswashion tae mak them trust ye. They're ower ready tae gie a' thing on trust; an' at the warst they're no muckle hurt by it. Indeed, lad, I hae the warst o' it, unco fash and feckle wi' them, a licht caracter amang the men, an' no a gude ane 'mang the wimmen." And the Drainer handled his cuttie thoughtfully, and looked sentimental, adding, "Deed, Jo, am tae be pitied."

"Then, be honest," said Jo, as the farm bell rung the hour of toil; "an' it's a lee that wimmen trust wi'oot their hairts being wiled awa', an' wi'oot reason for the faith that's in them. 'Deed, Deeran, ye're no tae be envied, for I am feared ye fa' in wi' the warst o' the queans." They went forth to their labour.

Jo Forsyth was sitting at the fireside where his labours kept his mother in humble comfort. He was carding wool, she was busy at the spinning wheel beside the ingle. "Jo, ye haena cleaned yersel for a week by-hand, an' I hae heard nought o' ma Maggie."

"Na, mither, I carena tae gang back. The pitcher ower aft at the well, fill or empty, comes tae crack. Mine's clean brock, mither. I'll no gang back again. Yon well's dry onyrate."

"What mean ye, lad?"

"Maggie Scott haes no luve to gie me. She maun hae looed the Dandy mortal. She hăesna gat ower it, an' ne'er will. As himsel' says, gin he crookit his fingar

a' the lasses i' the parish wad rin till him, Maggie amang the lave."

"Na, na, Jo. Ye're no jist i' that, lad. Maggie haes no remnant o' luve for Deeran; nane, I tell ye; but she canna forgie hersel' for trustin' sae souple a wuddie, an' she dreeds tae confide e'en whar her heart believes noo. But, mind, Jo, she haed great luve aince, an' a great punishment. Lat me see her, lad."

Jo stopped carding, and resting a hand on each knee, asked—"What d'ye say, mither?"

"I say lat me speak till her. I ken baith yer hairts, yer hairt and hers, Jo; an' I ken what it is that ails her. I'll put it richt atween ye."

Jo put down the carding-combs and lighted his pipe.

"Mither," he said, hoarsely, "ne'er think o', that agen. Maggie Scott kens ma hairt; leastwise, she oucht tae. Gin she'll no tak' me on ma ain suin', I'll no tak' her on the wooin' o' ony auld wife, mither or no mither. I'll no be made the jeer o' the parish! What way cud ye think it o' me?"

And Jo got up and went out, and his mother moodily dropped her spinning, and sat silently for full five minutes. Then she resumed her wheel, saying, "Gie ma lad the desire o' his hairt, if it be thy wull, O Lord! Thou knowest he desairves thy choice blessin'." When, half-an-hour afterwards, the old woman heard the lad's footsteps in the trance, she got up and met him, and

putting her hands on his shoulders, said, "Ma son, in God's name see her aince agen, for my sake."

The man said, "Weel, weel, mither."

Next day Widow Forsyth, having the happiness of her son very much at her heart, and earnestly desiring to penetrate the future, resorted to one of the many superstitious practices, which then lingered in the district, and which are not now wholly extinct. She had just finished knitting a pair of stockings for Jo. In forming the first row of meshes or loops on the knitting-wires, the end of the worsted thread hangs unused, commonly six inches long or more. She cut off these ends from the pair, and placed them above the door-jamb, and invoked the Holy Trinity. Thereafter, the first female who entered should bear the same Christian name as the future spouse of her son, for whom the stockings had been made. She spun on in patient expectation, but that whole day no female entered her cottage. Next day, however, while she was engaged with her bread and cup of weak tea at breakfast, a ragged gipsy girl raised the latch and stood before her, saying, "Gie me a piece."

"Troth wull I, bairn," said the woman; "but what's yer name, ma queanie?"

And the child pronounced a name such as the woman had never heard before; but, after several repetitions, she made out that it was "Charlotte," a name which sounded strangely to the widow, and seemed both

foreign and unfortunate. She gave some oat-cake to the little wanderer with a sigh, and turned away from her breakfast. It seemed that her lad's love must be crossed, and his happiness disappointed; and the strange name made her dread that he must leave her; and, for a time, a deep feeling of depression beset her. In prayer she lightened her soul; and at length resumed her knitting, saying, "Not oor wull, but thine be dune.'

Everybody must have noted a time in his experience, when a choice of courses of conduct being presented, the reason perceives the wiser and happier, and the heart approves and sides with the reason, but the will chooses the unwise and worse, in whim and self-despite. I have often watched this mood in children of the best disposition and keenest sensibilities, and have seldom seen the perverse volition overcome save by some genial touch of loving nature. A word of love, a tone of feeling, true to the circumstances, usually suffices. Stern reason or direct opposition are entirely useless. This was the state of mind of Maggie Scott when we last saw her, rejecting the suit of Jo Forsyth; and Jo's absence on the two following Mondays (Monday night was his usual night of visiting her) only confirmed her in her unreasonable mood. On the third Monday Jo came again. She was at the field-gate, a stone-throw from the farm-house of her master, the spot at which they used to meet, whence she usually led him to the kitchen, when nothing unwonted was going on there.

She met him as if there had been no interruption of his visits.

"Ah, Jo, lad, ye're weel; an' hoo's mither?"

"Brawly," said he; "yet no a' richt either."

"What's the maitter, Jo? I'd grieve i' ma hairt gin onything was wrang wi' her."

"I haena seen ye for twa weeks, an' I cam' noo at her biddin'. She haes ye an' me at her hairt; an' it's lik' tae be sair."

"What for, Jo? Ye're no gain tae leave her?" she asked with a sickly smile.

"No, I haena thocht o' that; but I'm tired o' ma luckless wooin', an' I meant tae tak' ye at yer last nicht's word, an' no fash ye again. Ma mither kent it, an' bade me come aince mair tae ask ye. Will ye tak' me wi her blessin'? I hae noucht to offer ye by ma labour an' ma luve, but ye ken ma luve is strong tae death, if ye wear it.

This was an unhappy speech. Quite natural, perhaps, in the circumstances, and not unloving. But it did not touch the tender chord in Maggie's nature, which would have brought her to her lover's bosom weeping. It lacked tenderness of tone, and aided the resistance of Maggie's will.

"Nay, Jo," she answered, "I feel yer mither's kindness warm i' ma hairt. She's been, an' ever will be, a mither an' mair tae me. But her luve misguides her. Her son's judgment is clearer an' better. I'll nae gie ye

second-hand luve. Ye dinna desairve it. I shudna wrang yer mither's son. In God's name, seek ye a younger an' fresh-hairted sweethairt. I'm nae mair for man's luve."

He was standing sidewise to her, his hands in his pockets, his face clouded and downcast to his chest.

"You have said it, Maggie Scott. Let byganes be byganes betwixt us." And he turned full towards her and held out his hand.

"Yes, lat them be byganes, dear Jo," she said, grasping his hand; "lat them be byganes; an' tell yer mither that it's ma luve for her an' you that stands atween us—that I bear her a dauchter's sense o' duty; an' ye, dear Jo, I tak' for ma brither, gin ye'll hae me."

The tears were in her eyes, and Jo saw them.

"God bless ye, Maggie; I will always bear ye luve."

Then all Maggie's old impetuosity surged upon her; and she threw herself on the lad's neck and wept, saying, "Brither, brither!"

Jo kissed her white face silently, repeated "God bless you!" and in great excitement strode down the lane. He did not know how near he was to obtaining his heart's desire when she had leant upon his shoulder weeping, and that the blame was his that the interview had left him still disappointed. When he entered his mother's room, silent and moody, the old woman did not stop her spinning to ask how he had fared.

"I kent it forehand, Jo," she said. "Dinna be doun-

cast ower muckle. The Lord's wull is aye best. His luve passeth the luve of wimmen."

"There's no disgrace in haein' loed a true lass like Maggie Scott, mither; even though she winna hae me."

At that same moment the girl had buried her head in her pillow in the lonely crib off her kitchen, and was sobbing as if her heart would break.

Now Durrand, taking love as lightly as he might, found it prosperous and successful. Thus, from time to time he had junketing with Miss Mary in the parlour, with wine and sweet bread and strumming on the piano; and in the kitchen he had the devotion of Betsy. Then, frowsy Mrs. Balders contributed to his amusement at the village. His drainage business, too, was advancing very favourably. The winter had been open, and, on the whole, dry, and he had done more work than he expected, so that he reckoned on a round sum of profit at the end of March, when he should make his season's settlement with Mr. Wilson. It is true that he had solemnly promised to marry Betsy, and that she believed and trusted him; but he had done as much a few times before to other girls, and did not find himself the worse for it. But the end of this campaign was distinctly unpleasant.

On the 20th of March Durrand received an interim payment of £50 from Mr. Wilson, and appointed his men to meet him at the village inn at two o'clock that

afternoon, to get payment for their last four weeks' labour. Before he left the farm at one, Betsy asked him to meet Miss Molly in the gloaming, as her father was to be absent, and this he promised to do. As usual at such settlements, the men clubbed their shillings together to treat their employer. Forsyth having seen the time-bill adjusted, and received his earnings, contributed his shilling to the drinking fund, and went off amid the jeers of the men. Durrand stayed with them, and they, having with rude songs and rough ill-mannered jests, consumed ten shillings' worth of whisky, he gave them "the maister's bottle" to wind up with, so when the party broke up in the dusk, they were all more or less intoxicated. Durrand then set out for Dell. He was not accustomed to drink whisky, although he had had similar bouts with his men on each recurring pay-day, and although Mrs. Balders had accustomed him to drink an occasional dram. Out on the road, he now found himself decidedly unsteady, for a cold north wind aggravated the influence of the drink. But on he went, now with devious, unequal, and staggering steps, now with a rush; and as he went he muttered snatches of the songs which had cheered the drinking party, or spoke aloud his sentiments of things and people in general. About a quarter of a mile from Dell he overtook a man, and staggered up to him in a friendly way, with "Weel, frien', ye'll be stransher here. Whish way gain'?"

"Ah! Mr. Durrand," replied the man thus accosted. "I'm goin' to Dell."

"What you gae Dell for? Am gain' t' Dell." And Durrand seized the man's arm, and turned him round and gazed vacantly at him in the gloom.

"Come along then," said the stranger.

They walked a few steps in silence, and Durrand hung for an instant in drunken somnolence on the man's arm. Then waking up, he staggered quickly forwards, muttering "Twishit jaud, Mish Mary. Fanshy kish her fingars!" Again he hung heavily on the man's arm, repeating "Fanshy kish her!" By-and-by, he went off at a run again, saying, "True lash, Beshie; fine lash!" Presently they arrived at the house at Dell.

Here the stranger appeared to hesitate as to what he should do, but Durrand broke away from him and entered the kitchen, into which the man followed him in a few minutes, to find Betsy with the Drainer. "What does this mean?" he asked quietly, on which Betsy looking up, tore herself from Durrand with a scream, and fled from the room.

"Whatsh up?" said the drainer, looking about him; and at last getting sight of the intruder, he went up to him, shouting, "Dam, what you dae on lashie?"

The man sternly asked him, "What brought you here drunk?"

"Watsh yer bushness?" and Durrand flung off his coat and neckcloth, making ready for a fight; but the man retreated, followed to the door with most

abusive words. This was Mr. Wilson of the Dell farm. In a few minutes the grieve and several ploughmen entered the kitchen. Their orders were to duck Durrand in the horse-pond, and then to see him clear of the premises and farm. They did remove him; and some of the ploughmen who disliked him for his assumed gentility of dress, and perhaps for his reputation, smashed his hat and tore his coat, and made him a sad figure with mud. But one humane lad saw him to the village, dreading lest he should perish by the wayside if left to himself, and delivered him at the door of his father's bothy. Next day the drainage work was stopped; and following on that came threats of legal proceedings for alleged defects in workmanship; and at length, to avoid litigation, Durrand renounced his contract, and adjusted his claims for the work performed by a compromise.

Durrand's visitings to Mrs. Balders had no better ending. While our little community was agitated by the affair at Dell just recorded, Elder Hewitson deemed it his duty to accost Thomas Balders, and to inform him that it was publicly stated that Mrs. Balders consumed more ardent spirits than was her fair allowance, and that she saw more of Mr. William Deeran than was good for her soul. Honest Thomas waxed wroth, and with difficulty restrained himself from, then and there, committing assault and battery on the person of the elder. But the month was not out before Balders saw the truth of Hewitson's statements. Balders had occa-

sion to go to Inverwick, and started in the afternoon with a young horse. The beast was seized with a colic at Howe, three miles from home, and after several hours' illness, the farmer abandoned his journey, and led the beast back to the village. It was eleven o'clock at night when he arrived. He secured the horse in the stable before he entered his dwelling. There he found Mrs. Balders and half-a-dozen women, "her cronies," and William Durrand seated round the hearth. The teapot was on the "hob," and each guest had a cup as Balders entered.

"Hech, frien's," said he, "ye're late at tea: I'm jist come in time."

An unmistakable odour of whisky-punch had met the man on entering the room. He was sure of it, for he had tasted neither meat nor drink since three o'clock, when he had left home. Mrs. Balders got up with a red face, saying, "Ye'll be better o' a guid drap, Tam. I'll mask anew for ye."

"Na, na," said he, seizing the teapot and cup from his wife's hands; "I'll e'en taste o' ma friens' broo;" and he poured out some of the contents of the teapot and drank it from the cup. It was almost undiluted whisky. He laid down the cup and took up his cart-whip, which he had thrown on the dresser.

"I tell ye what, friens; this is stronger than I bargained for. Ma wife's housekeeping seems tae be best whan ma back's turned. I maun superinten' it mair masel'; an' as the first step o't, I ask ye, nane o'

ye, ever tae darken ma door agen. There, noo, clear oot."

He cracked his whip, and the women were quickly gone. Durrand was slower in his motions.

"Get oot," roared the stout old man. "Get oot, ye low-lifed, dirty blackguard! Get oot, I say, or I may hairm ye in richt earnest;" and he plied the shoulders of the retreating dandy unscrupulously with his whip.

CHAPTER III.

Do we not, all of us, make too much of love? We tint and elevate a sentiment, the germ of which is primarily base and selfish, till it changes and colours our world, and exerts too great an influence on our lives. We make some woman or man our object, regard him or her as superhuman, and straightway fall down and worship. If our homage is accepted, we are elevated to the seventh heaven, until familiarity destroys our illusions. If we are repulsed, we are never undeceived; the common object of our regards is for ever an idol. The system would be a benefit to the race that brought us to recognise the just mean between the irreverence of Mr. William Durrand and the heroine-culture of Jo Forsyth. Life generally would be better and happier for it. To help to introduce such a system, I should be disposed, were I a minister of education, to make love-making, in its theory and reasonable practice, an ordinary subject of study. In progress of time the most beneficent results might ensue from the rational culture of this branch of knowledge.

Two years had passed since I last presented my friends to the reader, and how many changes do two years effect? Miss Mary Wilson was in the south in charge of her aunts, breaking their maidenly hearts with her vagaries. Betsy Morrison was gone, it was said, to

Inverwick; but no one knew what had become of her. Mrs. Balders was a widow, and had set up a huckster-shop. One young woman, for whom I have some regard, had reappeared among us. This was Ellen Ross. Her father, a hard-working man, who had started as head of a family in the humble calling of a dry-stone fence builder, had sent out his children as they grew up to earn their own livelihood, and had, by frugality and unflinching industry, saved a little money. Thereupon, abandoning dyke-building, he had set to buy and sell farm-produce, that so he might convert his plack into a bawbee. He was now settled in our village, and had taken up the trade of Thomas Balders deceased, and rented the fields which Balders had possessed, kept several cows, and forwarded by his carts country produce to the market of the county town. He was reputed "wealthy," paid for all his purchases in cash, and was even able to advance small sums to the crofters on the Braes at rent time, on the faith of grain or other goods to be delivered to him. He was a widower, and his daughter Ellen managed his domestic affairs.

Now Ellen Ross was twenty-seven years old, a buxom lass, tidy in her person and attire, affecting, indeed, a superiority of dress to the generality of the village girls. A more modish ribbon, and a gown of a better texture, distinguished her, when she "cleaned herself" at evening. Otherwise, she shrunk not from the labour to which she had been inured in youth, and toiled in the byre and afield like the other women, removed from

them mainly in this, that she was her own mistress. When they were some time settled in the village, and the estimate of the old man's wealth had got well fixed in the village mind, there was one man, who, not for the first time, recognised that he had made a mistake in life; but who now, for the first time, began to entertain a serious feeling, not of regret for the past, but of grudge against himself and fate; and that man was William Durrand. Indeed, the last two years had not been prosperous with him. Jobs seemed to have a tendency to go past him; he found it difficult to get work. Jo Forsyth had taken the field on his own account, and, somehow, was generally preferred to the smarter man. On the other hand, Durrand had saved nothing; and although he still persevered in maintaining his specialty of superior clothing, he was often, in periods of idleness, indebted to his father's potato-pot for his food. No wonder that now he saw how unfortunate was the complication that had deprived him of Ellen Ross, or that occasionally he cursed his stupidity and his untoward career.

Maggie Scott was still in the same service near the village, and Jo Forsyth still lived with his mother. No word of love had again passed between the pair, and the widow had evidently lost her interest in the match. Jo's visits to the girl had ceased; but Maggie, every Sunday afternoon, on her way from church, visited the cottage of her friends, and, generally, Jo saw her on these occasions. Maggie was changed very much. Her eye, which used to sparkle and flash with emotion, was

now subdued and soft and shy. Her whole face told of the soul within—subdued and saddened, and very tender. Tenderness, indeed, had become the prevailing feature of her character. As Widow Forsyth said to her son, "Maggie aye distresses me. Whan she telt me o' Jock Sandisson's deid bairn, she grat lik' it wus her ain. She canna speak o' a bealed thoom, but the tears are in her een; an' as for the preachin's, I believe she greets a' the sermon through. Somethin' maun be wrang wi' her. She wusna this lik' whan we first kent her, ill as she wus." And something did ail Maggie, but she could not tell it to the widow or her son. If the son had any notion of the secret, he held his peace.

In those days the life of William Durrand was not an enviable one. In his idleness, he often lay abed till seven o'clock, long before which hour his old father, now sadly broken down, had repaired to the potato-rig, and, with spectacles on nose, was toiling at this, to him, arduous occupation, by which his back was twisted out of all sartorial use and wont. Lazily the young man dressed himself, and having breakfasted from the porridge-pan, which he but little contributed to fill, he went out immediately to avoid his mother's long prayers, and the other harassments of family worship. Indeed, this was not much to be wondered at, for the mother made her prayers bristle with pointed references to the son, and by urgent prayers for the preservation of the old tailor, her "earthly head," more or less directly implied that her son was not what he should be. Mortal

drainer could not stand that. He went out, but this being the general breakfast hour, he preferred to go off into the fields, for too many labourers and their spouses were clamant for small balances of wages, a shilling or two each, to make his progress through the village comfortable. His only joyous hour was, when at night he slipped into Widow Balders's. With her he was a handsome fellow and a hero still; and she was still in circumstances to give him a dram. Late of the night he found himself again under his father's roof, where poor Margaret had sat gloomily waiting for him by the smouldering peat-fire. "Ah, Willie!" Margaret would say, "ye're aye late. Faither and mither are lang beddit; but they ne'er sleep till ye come in." Then William, without replying, would slink away to his bed, and undress in the dark.

Now it happened that old Ross required to have some drains cleared out, and some new drains made on his land, and he looked about for a person to do his work. Jo Forsyth was fully occupied, and the dandy was the only other villager competent. Indeed, although Ross had been strongly recommended to employ Forsyth, he was struck by the smart appearance of Durrand, and fixed on him to do the job. This brought Durrand to Ross's house, and once again into contact with Nellie. The old man knew nothing of their former love-passages; and Nellie received Durrand in a way which, although quiet and demure, certainly did not indicate any hostile feeling. In truth, Ellen Ross never had been a senti-

mental girl. She was what may fairly be described as "a sensible lass," who perceived what it was fair and reasonable to do, and did it. Thus, it had appeared to her a fair and prudent thing to get into a courtship with William Durrand seven years before; but when Maggie Scott was said to be dying for love of that deceiver, and all the country-side cried "shame" to him, she cast Durrand off, and did not suffer much in so doing. Then she was twenty, and time and experience had not modified her disposition, so that she should now unnecessarily show sentimental dislike to the young man. On the contrary, she was learning to be cautious in her treatment of young men, who were likely to make a fair fight in the struggle of life, and she had her father's word for it, that "this Deeran is an unco smairt chiel, an' does his wark as if he ne'er wore aucht but moleskin;" and she knew her father was usually reticent of his praise. Therefore Nellie was distinctly civil; and Durrand began to think that he might still hope, not so much for her love, he did not think much of love, but that he might get her to wife, with all the relative advantages of her father's wealth, and credit, and connection. But he knew that he was not the only aspirant to this happy fortune, for James Leask, the joiner, called often at the house, and Jo Forsyth was not altogether unknown at the fireside of the Rosses. Durrand reckoned little of that:—"Thae louts!" said he to himself; "if aince I get ma hand in, I'll sune birstle them oot." He was a fellow of consummate conceit, this our dandy friend.

Durrand, over a glass of punch with Mrs. Balders, told her of his hopes in this matter. She was very hard and dry regarding it. Her opinion of Ellen Ross was, "She's a flauntin' flarin' gouk. I only seed her i' the kirk, but she pits on mair airs than wad the Countess. An' I'se warran' ye're 'deceived aboot the auld man. Ma ain puir man! wha that kent him wad hae thoucht he wad leave his widdie tae sell tapes an' odds an' ends o' things, jist for a leevin'. Och! och! Tak' ma word for't—the auld man's no a Jew."

Mrs. Balders was very bitter, and the truth was, she had personal reasons for it. But this notwithstanding, Durrand cultivated old Ross's good opinion by all the means in his power, and sought the young woman's society and favour as much as his opportunities permitted him. One day Ross was driving a young horse in a cart in the field where Durrand was at work. The horse was startled, and the old man was thrown off the cart. Helen Ross was in the field also, "lifting" potatoes; and Durrand and she were speedily together over the prostrate form of her father; and, in the excitement of the occasion, while he was stilling her screams and soothing her, Durrand once more called her "Nellie, dear Nellie;" and was not rebuked. He continued thereafter to call her Nellie, and to adopt towards her a tone of tenderness, and she did not resent it. Indeed, at this time Durrand was fully impressed with the necessity of forming an alliance such as this, for he had received a letter from a solicitor in Inverwick, who, as agent for Messrs.

Macfitt & Co., clothiers and men's mercers there, demanded payment of £25 : 6 : 4, attour 2s. 6d. as the charge for writing the letter, and intimated the service of a summons unless payment were made within ten days. The said Macfitt & Co. were creditors of poor Durrand for those splendid coats and hats which he wore of evenings, but the value of the goods was not one-half of the prices charged. Durrand walked to Inverwick, and having no money to tender in payment, was thankful to arrange the matter by granting his bill for the sum at four months' date. How could he be gay with Nelly Ross or any one else with this burden on his mind? How could he be otherwise than dull at Mrs. Balders' fireside, where he was allowed to be natural and unrestrained?

It happened about this time, that on her way home from church, Maggie Scott met an acquaintance, with whom was Mrs. Balders. Maggie did not know the widow; but the widow knew Maggie well, and as she would say, "a' the ins an' oots aboot her." It was the most casual meeting, and lasted only for a minute or two; but, in course of it, Mrs. Balders contrived to do as much mischief as possible.

"Dearie me, lassie, I hae a bit news for ye. Ye'll be glad tae hear that yer auld flame, Jo, is busy courtin' yon bouncin' baggage," and she pointed to Ellen Ross, who was then passing from the church. Maggie knew Ellen by sight.

"It's vera lik'ly lik'," was all that Maggie could reply.

Then she turned away hastily and sped her home, weeping as she went. For this was the secret which was crushing Maggie's life and soul—she loved the lad Forsyth, whose love she had rejected. She did not call on Mrs. Forsyth that afternoon. She could not.

I daresay that if Mrs. Forsyth had had a daughter of her own, the Sunday visits of Maggie Scott would have been of little importance to her. As it was, these visits were a great matter. There was something about the little red-haired woman that had got into the widow's heart, and kept possession of it. It was no wonder, for Maggie had a womanly, gushing heart, which was felt in all she did. So the widow, who was too frail to travel to the distant church, sat a while at her Bible after Jo came home that Sunday. At length she raised her head and asked, "Wus Maggie i' the kirk, lad?" Jo said she was, and the old woman resumed her reading. By-and-by she again turned from her book and exclaimed, "What can hae stoppit Maggie the day?" Her son made no reply, and after musing for a little, she resumed her reading. But again she ceased reading, and took off her spectacles and wiped them, and, with emphasis, inquired, "Wus she lookin' weel, ma son?" and being assured on this point, she burst out, "What i' a' the warld haes keepit Maggie? I dinna feel lik' settin' aboot the denner till she com'."

"Get ye the denner ready, mither, an' I'll step oot an' speir for her by-an'-by," said Jo.

So the old woman went to her duties, repeating again and again, "What i' a' the warld?"

When Jo Forsyth that evening stepped into Maggie's kitchen, she was sitting by the fire, and alone. He entered as he used to do in other days, without knocking, and when he put his hand on her shoulder, and she, startled, turned round her face, he was surprised and touched to find that her eyes were red, and she was weeping. "Are ye no weel, Maggie?" he eagerly asked.

"Quite weel, Jo," she answered, half-choked, as she got up and pretended to look for a pan.

"Then, Maggie, what ails you?" he asked kindly.

"Och, naething, naething; I'll be a' richt by-an'-by."

"But, sister dear," he said in his tenderest voice, for he saw that she was really distressed, and he was grieved. "Dear Maggie, ye took me for a brither aince. Tell yer brither what ails ye."

Then there followed such a fit of crying and sobbing that the young man was perplexed beyond measure; while all the articulate sounds that he heard from her were, "Leave me the noo, dear Jo; leave me the noo;" and at length Jo, greatly distressed, was fain to take himself away from a grief which it seemed impossible for him to mitigate. But he did not go beyond the door. There he stood, and said to himself, "I think it's a' richt. She's certain sure in luve noo agen; an' wha wi' but masel'?" and he stood for a minute absolutely chuckling. Then he went back to the kitchen, and took the woman in his strong arms; and with as matter-of-fact a voice as he could command, and a tearful smile on his face, he said, "Maggie, Maggie dear! am thinkin' ye're in

luve agen; and am no tae let ye past me a'thegither, wi'ooten anither refusal o' me. Will ye hae me, Maggie? Ye ken I ne'er looed anither."

She held her breath in almost painful silence while he spoke. Then she flung her arms round his neck, kissed him a few hungry kisses, and broke into hysterical sobs and laughter. Then Jo knew that she loved him with all that intense nature of hers, and he was very happy as he held her in this paroxysm. His sense of happiness made him entirely self-satisfied and cool, so that while her head lay jerking on his bosom, he winked hard at the plated dish-covers that adorned the kitchen-wall, sole witnesses of his felicity. But in came Mrs. Thompson, with "What earthly is the matter, Maggie?" and seeing how Jo held her, and that she was sobbing convulsively, the lady sternly demanded what he had done to her.

"Nought ava," said Jo, somewhat dourly, for he had not called for the attendance of witnesses; "onless," he added after an interval—"onless an offer of mairriage be ony wrang;" and again, after another pause, "An' am thinkin' she'll tak' me tae;" and he pressed his loving burden in his stalwart arms.

Then in came Farmer Thompson, attracted by the voices, and learning the position of matters, he took Jo into his parlour, while Mrs. Thompson took charge of the young woman, who was greatly favoured, as she deserved. Jo was congratulated and got a dram, and had five minutes with Maggie afterwards reassuring

her; and she told him of Mrs. Balders's gossip which had distressed her, and he laughed heartily and happily thereat. Then he went his way. And on his way, although it was the Lord's night, Jo cut capers, and could not refrain from whistling, for the dram and the love-making had gone together to the poor fellow's head. At length he got home.

"An' wus she vera ill?" asked Mrs. Forsyth eagerly, when Jo came in.

"Aye, gey an' bad," said Jo; "but she's a' richt noo."

"Was it a cholic-lik' or a dwam?" asked she. "I'm a' anxiety tae hear."

"Na, mither," replied Jo; "it was the hairt."

"Ah, the puir dawtie! She haes ower muckle hairt, an' ower saft. Did Mrs. Tamson gie her some brunt speerits?"

"Na, mither, but she's ower wi't noo. Leastwise she'll be a' richt when she comes tae ye aifter the term."

"Winna she be able tae be oot neist Sunday? I hope she's no vera ill. I wish I cud traivel her length, puir lass!"

"O, I'm sure she'll com' in neist Sunday. She beet tae dae it tae get yer blissin', mither; am tae mairry her at the term."

"Mairry her! mairry her! na, lad, na; that canna be! I ken it's His will ye maun mairry a lass—what wus the name again? a lass, Charlotte. It canna be!"

"I ken noucht o' ony Charlotte, mither; an meantime I ken I hae promised tae mairry Maggie Scott, an'

she haes promised tae mairry me. I wadna gie her for a thoosan' Charlottes! I'm gey happy, mither, for she's a luvin' lass!"

"God grant there com' nae ill o' it," said the mother, solemnly. "*I* dinna see hoo it's tae be. It shud be Charlotte!" And, to the amazement of Jo, his mother began fervently to pray for him and Maggie. But he saw that love for both of them was the cause of it; and greatly he marvelled that love could breed such vagaries as he had that night experienced.

Widow Balders was not satisfied with her shop-keeping. It yielded but an indifferent return for her trouble, and was very slow and worrying. So she lighted upon another and more pleasant way of making a pound or two. Perhaps, too, her sagacity led her to form ulterior projects from it. She swept out the old threshing-floor of the barn which Balders had built, hired a strolling dancing-master, canvassed the lads and lasses to attend his instructions, illuminated the barn with three tallow candles, and set up a dancing-school at the moderate charge of twopence per night for each lad, and each lad was allowed to bring "a partner." Cakes and sweetmeats, treacle-beer and ginger-beer, tobacco and pipes, were for sale in the adjoining out-house, which in former days was the byre; and there Martha Balders, aged ten years, poor thing! dispensed these commodities at moderate charges. This arrange-

ment was, no doubt, spoken of disparagingly as "Luckie Balders' penny reels;" but it was new and was successful; and the Dandy Drainer materially contributed to its success. There he was supreme,—all but James Leask, the joiner, unhesitatingly admitting his superiority. It really was wonderful how he could and did disport himself here while that bill was hastening to maturity; and, no doubt, the widow had to stimulate him to exertion by an occasional dram. The Dandy took no partner to these dances. His delight was to get hold of the partner of some youth well steeped in love, and to annoy him by a flirtation with her for the night. The widow, by divers influences and by a special invitation, prevailed on Ellen Ross to visit the scene one night, "just for a dance." On that occasion the rivalry of Leask and the Dandy nearly led to a quarrel, and Ellen came not again. But this led Durrand to press his suit more closely. So one night he followed her from her father's hearth to the byre, and, dandy clothes and all, he set to clean it out for her, while she stood by and rewarded him with many smiles. With a vague attempt at feeling he referred to their former courtship.

"Oh, Nellie," he said, "ye altered a' ma life for the warse when ye cast me aff."

"Puir chiel! Ye war slippery yersel'; but I bear ye nae ill will noo."

"Is that all?" said he, pathetically.

"Na, Deeran, I'm na gain' tae tell ye mair, man. What mair hae ye speired for?"

He would fain have craved a renewal of their old relations, but he could not shape his speech, for the thought came upon him most strongly and unfortunately at that moment, that he had no home to propose to take her to; and a marriage deferred did not suit his projects. He saw, too, that she was entirely self-possessed, and not to be hurried away into rash engagements. So he left the byre, and went off to Widow Balders, very much dejected. Was it strange that the conversation set Miss Ross thinking the same thoughts? "The chiel haes neither hoose nor haddin'," she said to herself, "naething but his claes! Ane cudna leeve inside *his* coat, braw though it be." Then and there she formed a decided preference for Leask.

In March, when field-work began to press on the young men, and their attendance at the dances began to slacken, Widow Balders resolved to wind the season up by "a ball." Then there was great preparation for this coming event among the young people. Several men of Jo Forsyth's squad of labourers had attended the dances, and a deputation of these came to Jo requesting him to countenance their ball by his presence. This they did at the suggestion of Mrs. Balders, who desired to secure as many guests and as much respectability as possible. Jo consented, anticipating much happiness in the company of Maggie, his engagement with whom was now well known. So he agreed to go, and, as a preliminary, he got Mrs. Thompson's consent to Maggie's absence

from household duty for the night. But it was hard work to prevail on Maggie to go.

"A'm ower happy, Jo, dear," she said; "ower happy far, an' ma hairt ower fu', tae gae dancin' an' caperin'."

But when Jo looked vexed about it, she said, "I'll dae onything; but dinna look that way."

So she, too, set to her preparations; and when dressed in her white muslin skirt and black boddice (how neatly some of those lowly girls do dress), with a white rose in her wavy auburn air, for her hair had faded from red to auburn, she certainly was a pretty little woman, and right proud of her was Jo. Now, when Jo had first asked her to the ball, he had tendered her money, saying, "Maggie, here are twa-three notes. Ye maun get a nice frock an' things."

But she, taking his hand, said, "Na, na, Jo. Whan I'm a' yer ain, twa months tae com', ye'll claid an' uphaud me, but I'll no tak' siller the noo."

This night on the way to the ball, while Jo was wondering at her pretty garments, and saying that she must be bare of money, while he had plenty, and would fain have repeated his offer, she broke out a-laughing at him, saying, "Ye dinna ken yer wee wifie! ye dinna ken half o' her! She haes twenty pound o' her ain savin's, a' in Will Watson's bank (she meant the Savings' Bank). But it's no hers noo; it's yer ain, dear lad."

The occasion of the ball was not a happy one for William Durrand. He was working, working hard;

but having only small jobs, and only one man employed with him, his profits were not in excess of a fair day's wages. His bill was past due and unpaid. Not knowing what to do, he had gone to Inverwick to beg for time, and had then been served with a writ charging him to pay within six days, under pain of imprisonment. The six days were also expired, and on the morning of the ball he had received a note from the lawyer intimating that a warrant for his apprehension would be applied for unless the debt were paid that day. Poor fellow! At first he thought of running away, but gradually he calmed down, and resolved to make the ball the occasion of asking Ellen Ross to have him for her husband. If she accepted him, then, perchance, some arrangement with these urgent creditors might be come to. If she did not, he must face the sheriff's officer with resignation.

The ball was a grand affair. The sum realised by Mrs. Balders at the door was two pounds twelve shillings, showing there were fifty-two men present, we presume, with as many ladies. The room was decorated with branches of evergreens and other ornaments of a simple kind, and was very brilliant with numerous candles, two fiddlers, and the crowd of muslin and moleskin there assembled.

"Lik' heeven!" said one barn-yard beauty, who had just finished a dance, and was squeezing her way

through the crowd for a mouthful of fresh air near the door.

Ellen Ross was there with her father; but the old man went off to "the refreshment room" to have a pipe, and having found a resting-place on some peats, there he remained for hours.

On went the dancing; and the Dandy Drainer, certainly a strapping, well-looking fellow, nicely dressed, rose to the occasion, and "danced as gracefully as a girl," some of the men said. And there was daffing and laughing, and much expenditure of muscle, as reel followed reel in endless succession. But at length Mr. Durrand ceased to dance. Lucky Balders drew near him.

"Maister Deeran," said she, "what for are ye no dancin'?"

"Wha can dance forenent that brute Jamie Leask?" answered Durrand sulkily. "He aye hauds at the heid i' the kimpany, an' kicks oot lik' a cowt. I wunner Nellie Ross sticks sae till him."

"Ay, lad; Nellie maybe kens the chances o' him. He's as likely a chiel tae mairry as ony i' the barn."

"They say he cam' courtin' ye aince, Mrs. Balders," said Durrand pettishly. "What ailit ye at him, if he's sae likly?"

"Maybe this, maybe that; but a handfu' o' trade's worth a goupin o' goold. Ony gait, I'd as sune hae young Leask, the jyner, as the dandiest drainer i' the parish," was the widow's tart rejoinder.

"That's sauce for ye, Bill Deeran," said Bell Fraser. "Luckie Balders aye gies as guid as she gets;" and Bell, who had been listening unobserved, went off with a laugh.

With whoop, and shout, and frantic snapping of fingers, on went the dances. And now the drainer had got Ellen Ross, and she heard the praises of their dancing on all sides, and she saw Leask looking on glumly. When this dance was done there was an interval to rest the fiddlers, and while most of the couples resumed their seats, Durrand and Miss Ross promenaded up and down the room.

"Nellie," said he, "hoo cam' ye to daunce a' nicht wi' Leask? Yer shins maun be black an blue wi' him. He's a tairin' dancer."

"Noo, Deeran, dinna ye be speakin' ill o' Leask. He's a brave chiel, although, maybe, nae sae weel buskit as yersel'. Trowth, ye're ilka lass's laddie. Noo, Leask is nae sae prodigal."

"Weel, maybe it's mair ma fate than ma faut, Nelly," said he; when up came Jo Forsyth, saying, "Miss Ross ye war tae daunce the neist reel wi' me."

"Dinna ye see her engaged wi' me the noo?" said Durrand angrily.

"Speak whan ye're spoken to. Am no speakin' tae ye, man," Jo tartly answered.

"Be aff, man," said Durrand contemptuously, "she's wi' yer betters."

"Betters!" echoed Jo, losing his temper; "some folks tak' on airs whan they're oot o' a job."

"Some folk mak' a job o' an affcast," said Durrand. "Be aff, man, an' stick tae ma leavins."

The words were scarcely uttered when Jo struck him heavily with his fist on the face, and Durrand went down on the floor. Instantly there was a tumult. Mrs. Balders screamed and rushed to help Durrand to his feet, while a number of men were threatening Jo, and as many or more were ranged about for his protection; and Maggie Scott was clinging to his neck in terror.

"Let the blaggard say it agen," shouted Jo. "Let him say it agen, an' doun he gangs agen, as am leevin'."

But Ellen Ross calmed them all by speaking out—"I promised, ye see, tae daunce neist reel wi' Forsyth, an' he cam' tae claim me. That man," pointing to Durrand, "keepit me, and insulted him; an' forbye him his bonny bride. He desairves what he got, an' mair."

James Leask spoke out too—"If the vagabone said it o' me or mine, I'd hae his hairt oot."

Widow Balders led Durrand off to her dwelling-house, bleeding profusely. Up struck the fiddlers, and on went the dancing. Jo resigned Miss Ross to Leask, and sat with Maggie in a corner. Ere the dance was done the excitement of the quarrel had passed away.

Durrand held his bleeding nose over the bowl of water with which the widow supplied him, for her

basin "was crackit." She consoled him, saying it was mean of Forsyth to strike him unawares. "An' yon hussy, Nell Ross, tae spake up agen ye. Ye see hoo the lan' lies wi' her noo?"

Durrand blubbered while he bled. She gave him some whisky, pouring it into a cup for him to drink from, as no glass could be found. After that the poor fellow became maudlin, for he had been drinking previously to stimulate him for the business of the night. "Oh," he whined, "she'll no tak' me noo; she'll no tak' me."

"Nellie Ross 'll never tak' ye, man; if that's what ye mean. She's pleedged tae the lad Leask," said the woman energetically. "I heard her say it masel."

"Am brock! clean ruined an' dune for," whimpered Durrand; "the offishers 'ill tak' me the morn! Lord, Lord!"

The poor fellow's state was piteous. Widow Balders cocked her ears at the mention of "officers," and gradually she extracted the whole story from the man. He was sure he would be seized to-morrow.

"Deeran," said the widow, "ye an' me ken ane anither weel, an' hae haen a bit dauffin afore noo thegither. I hae as muckle as will pay the debt, an' start ye in the warl forbye. Let it be a match atween us."

Durrand shrunk within himself in the chair, and wiped his nose in silence over the bowl. She gave him more drink. At length the bleeding stopped, and Durrand fell asleep, and she put him to bed.

Just as Durrand anticipated, M'Nab, the sheriff-officer, found his way to Widow Balders's door next morning before Durrand left his bed. "Jess," said Durrand to the widow, calling her by her Christian name, "ye maun settle this for me."

"Then, yon's agreed on? Whan will the day be?"

"Whan ye lik'," said he, with the driest of throats.

Then the widow called in M'Nab and his man to the room where Durrand lay, and after some account of his injuries, she told them that the lad had long been courting her, and that now she must just take him and take charge of him; and as it was all settled between them, Mr. M'Nab would write the notice for proclamation of the banns of their marriage. She would pay him for it. M'Nab quickly did the writing, and Durrand, submitting himself to his fate, signed the paper. The widow gave them a dram all round, and did not forget her right to a share of the liquor. Then she took money from a drawer, and took M'Nab to another room "tae settle wi' him quietly," and she counted out forty pounds before him. "Ye see I hae the siller, Maister M'Nab," said she; "but am laith tae pairt wi' it till I'm surely buckled wi' him. He's a slipp'ry chiel! What shall I dae?"

"Weel, widow," said the officer, "I see noucht that ye can do, unless ye tak' an assignation tae the deeligence."

"What's that?" she asked.

"Just a bit paperie that a lawyer will mak' for ye, making over the debt and warrants till ye. Then, if the

lad tries ony pranks, ye can clap him by the heels whan ye send for me."

"That's the thing," she said; "the assienation is jist the thing tae mak' it siccar. I'll gang tae Innerwick wi' ye aifter I see the session-clerk."

This precaution was taken, and Durrand was married to the widow within a fortnight. All the villagers laughed and jeered. On the wedding-night few were found to enter the house of the new couple, and bitterest in their revilings were the poor old tailor and his spouse.

It was a very unfortunate marriage, a union of all the elements which tend to destroy domestic comfort and peace. The woman, too, had exhausted the small balance of her former husband's means in paying Durrand's debt and law charges. Very soon M'Nab visited them again, and rouped off her shop-goods, and most of the household furniture, to satisfy a claim against Durrand "for aliment," at the instance of a Betsy Morrison. Do you wonder at the present state of the Dandy Drainer? A drunken, untidy, loud-voiced slut of a wife, four poor little bairns as step-children, and a proclivity to drink himself, when, in the language of the village, "he can win at it"—have reduced him to the man you see.

A pleasant contrast is the life of Jo Forsyth and his wife, Maggie Scott. Widow Forsyth is now very frail. It was long before she got over her sense of insecurity regarding the marriage which she feared "wus no or-

dainit." But Maggie is more than a daughter to her; and happy in her husband's love, and the mother of several fair children, she is joyous as little woman ever may be, and all the happier for that struggle with her affections, unworthily engaged, and for the culture of a pure heart and generous aims.

THE MASON'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

SHE was buried to-day; and on her coffin was marked, in gilded letters,—

LIZZIE MOWAT,

AGED

X I X.

They buried her in the quiet corner of the auld kirk-yard beside the yew-tree. She was pleasant in life, ever loving and gentle; too gentle long to combat with life's asperities. Last time I saw her she was weeping. We were talking of the past; but her tears were not bitter tears of sorrow; nor did they flow in dread that the well of tears, life, was speedily to become dry, although she lay on her deathbed and knew it. Her tears were for gentle memories, sympathetic with the past. She recalled pleasant things of her bright days. "For you see I had my bright day," she said, while her eyes were luminous with the pleasant tears. "I am not sorry it is past. God has brought me near to a brighter day, which

shall know no shadow or evening!" Her father was the burly and rough man, red-faced and red-whiskered, who followed her bier, looking sanguine even in his mournings; and these were her brothers, always to her "her little brothers," who walked before. Her father is the master mason, and, in some sort, the architect of the village and district. Poor Lizzie! with all his roughness, he loved her. Who was that strange figure, with the wisp of crape down his back, and the white comforter with the black spots?—a novelty that for a mourner! Why, that was James Moffat, and he sorroweth for her as deeply as one sorroweth for a first-born love. Well! which was her bright day? I fear her bright day was not oppressively bright. Indeed, very bright days do not leave very pleasant memories. Sunshine and shadow, and wind and rain, ay, and transient storm, are all needed to compose the best sense of pleasure in the past. But four years ago Lizzie was a pretty little maiden of fifteen, with a pearly complexion and a faint damask bloom on her cheek, and that gentle curve and roundness of figure which are so charming in budding maidenhood. As she went to the village school, with her linen sunbonnet and spotless printed frock, leading her little brothers, five and seven years younger than she respectively, with an old-fashioned air of prudence and patronage, she was the fairest of all the village children. I sometimes saw her at her home. In the summer evenings she conned her lessons, and saw that her brothers prepared theirs, under the shade of the apple-tree in her

father's garden. Once I found her up in the cleft of the old tree, and heard her sing an old song from her perch. I said she was a pretty bird, but too big.

"Oh," she said, "I do wish I was a bird, to fly singing all day over the green fields, and up the blue sky; forever flying, and singing, and glad."

"But the birds are not always flying, and singing, and glad. When the snow and the cold winds come, their lodging is on the cold, cold ground."

"I suppose," she said, looking queerly solemn, "no body or bird can be glad for ever."

It was about that time that the following dialogue occurred. Her father and mother were the speakers as they sat at tea.

"The morn is the skule quarter-day, and Mrs. Archibald will be wantin' the fees. What for are we hauding Lizzie at the skule? She's been lang eneuch there. I'm minded tae dae wi'oot the servant lass. Lizzie can mind the bairn and sweep aboot."

"No, no," said Mowat; "Lizzie's not a strong child. She's best at school for a while yet."

"I only gat three winters at the skule masel. Ye think naething o' the meat and wages o' the lass, forbye the skule-fees, though ye're aye hard up for siller."

"Oh, we can't help that. I want Lizzie to get a little more schooling. It wont hurt her, and—bother the fees! I often spend more in a foolish way, wife."

"Nae twa doots about that, gudeman. Yer drams at the public wad pay mony skule-fees, but ye'll no

think o' me toilin', and scrapin', and warkin' ma fingar banes bare; but ye'll 'bather' the fees."

"Come, come, my dram has nothing to do with this. The lassie is getting on well and is a good counter. She's not fit for much work."

"I suppose ye're to mak' a leddy o' the mason's dochter? In my day faithers haed mair sense."

"Whatever I want in the way of sense, I often wish that my wife's tongue was more civil;" said the mason, as he got up with his face very red, and closed the conversation by going out. I daresay he went off to the inn; at least, after such bouts with his shrewish wife, he often did go there, thus vainly and falsely compensating himself for his wife's want of sympathy or her reckless speech. Certainly this mother of Lizzie would have scanty apprehension of, and no sympathy at all for Lizzie's fancy of flying and singing all day up the blue sky and over the green fields. Yet in many respects Mrs. Mowat was a true woman; full of a stern sense of duty; rigidly discharging herself of every duty to husband and children and all around her, in the scrimp and stinted measure of her nature; always most thrifty and careful in housewifery; hating dust and uncleanliness as deadly sin; and most meritorious in scourings of floor and platter. The pity was, that instead of softening life and its duties with love, her hardness and coldness chilled her most tender actions. Lizzie's gladness could not be for ever.

At the northern end of the village there was a small

market-garden, open to the field, of which, indeed, it was formerly a part; and in the field and beside the garden stood a tumble-down old cottage, partly roofed with tiles, partly with dilapidated thatch. A portion of the walls was apparently propped up by rough old deals. The ivy climbed green over the roof, and hid chinks and crannies in the thatch, while over the deal wall fragrant honeysuckle clustered in rich profusion, together beautifying the crumbling old place. At the end of the cottage was a cowshed of similar frail construction; and beyond that a heap of compost and two or three old glass frames. This was "Black's Nursery," in the nomenclature of the village. But Black was dead many years ago, and it was his widow who now rented the field, making a narrow living by the sale of milk, yielded by her cow fed on the field, and of the crops of cabbages, shalots, and other vegetables, which with patient labour she won from the garden-plot. Thus she had fed herself and her only child, now a boy of sixteen years, often barely enough, sometimes with an anxious heart before rent-day, but always with a faithful courage and a patient gentle soul. She sold of her milk a daily pint to the family of Mowat the mason, and William Black, her boy, delivered it every morning.

Now that boy engrossed the widow's soul. She was tender of him as the apple of her eye; and her one absorbing desire was, that so common in Scotch mothers, that her William should be a minister. For this she struggled, keeping him steadily at school, sacrificing her

evening cup of tea, contenting herself with dry bread when there was demand for the whole milk of her cow; for the fees and books were heavy charges on her since the boy had come to learn such unwonted things as Greek and Latin. On his part, the boy took kindly to his lessons and made progress. In the long summer mornings he was often up at four, getting up his fifty lines of Virgil or his Æsop, before the cow was milked, and he was sent out with the milk-pail. Nor did it ruffle the dignity of the young scholar so to go forth. He had in him much of the humble courage and enduring spirit of his mother.

Thus it was that Lizzie Mowat knew Willie Black. He was the boy who brought the milk for her porridge. Occasionally, too, he brought her a flower from the garden; a rose sometimes, sometimes a spray of honeysuckle, sometimes of the few other flowers that grew in it tended by himself. And Lizzie was always gentle with the pleasant boy. Was she not always gentle? And in her childish way she had long ago called him "Billie B.," and she used to rhyme "Billie B., Billie B., he brings milk to me," and so on. But that was in younger days. Now Willie often looked into the sweet face of the little girl, and lost himself in the soft blue of her eyes. There was a long distance between the daughter of the enterprising mason and "the milk-boy," as Mrs. Mowat called him. Yet often, after staring into Lizzie's eyes as he delivered his little flower, he would return uncomfortably to his Virgil and

Sallust, and have difficulty in settling down to address "Patres conscripti."

Mrs. Mowat had her way. Unbendingly persistent, she always, in domestic matters, had her way in the end, changing the mason's purpose, or ignoring it. The servant lass was dismissed, and Lizzie was charged with the bulk of her duties—the sweeping of the floors, the washing of dishes, the scouring of the uncarpeted floors, and the entire management and nursing of "baby Johnnie," now three years old, but feeble and sickly, scarcely able yet to put his legs under him; "delicate" they said he was. Lizzie, thus, had to lay down her books, and to abandon the conquest of the compound rule of three, which she was beginning to comprehend. Instead of books and sums came sharp lessons from her querulous mother in the scrubbing of floors and the wiping of dishes. She had been wont, under and up in the apple tree, to sing such little ditties as she had picked up, either from Mrs. Archibald at school, or from her playmates. But now indoors her mother objected to singing. "Sangs," she said, "are the weans o' idleness. A singin' tradesman has aye a cauld hearth and a dirty hoose. Nae lass o' mine 'll forget she's no a mavie while under my han's." Thus, while the soul of the little girl was longing for the blue sky and green fields, and to vent itself in bursts of song, she was held to scrubbing and dusting, and to urge her to exertion she had promises of cookery to be learned. Mrs. Mowat had a faculty for making work, and Lizzie was

fully occupied from early morning "till after the tea-dishes were washed." No doubt, some days and most evenings she was sent "out with the bairn," and then had leave to wander at her will, through the green lanes and by the hedgerows. But wearied and crushed with work, sore from her mother's acrid tongue, and freighted with the heavy boy in her arms, what pleasure had she in sky or grassy lane? None; not even in the tidiest of sun-bonnets, nor the prettiest of print frocks to be seen in the village, with which it was the pride of her mother that she should always go forth. But a sweet rosebud, or a cluster of carnations, now brought to her by Billie B., appeared more pleasant than heretofore. Put in water and placed in the window, the flowers were full of goodness and beauty; and Lizzie often turned to them and took courage when her mother was keenest for work, or sharpest with her words. Strange, was it not, that the mother never suspected an insidious spirit in the flowers, and did not rend them as evil?

In August William Black won all the senior prizes in the parish school; and the minister who presided at the examinations declared he was proud of the boy, and that if he continued in welldoing the parish would have credit through him. Then the widow confided to the minister her heart's desire to send the boy to college, whereat the worthy man smiled and shook his head. She was not discouraged. She had had a brother, she told him, long since dead, as friendless as her Willie, who went out like a stripling from a shepherd's hut, and

had won a bursary in contest with Goliaths at Aberdeen College. Why should Willie not do as much? The minister said that might happen once. He wot not of the deep enthusiasm of the widow, nor that her spirit had entered into her son, nor did he gauge the lad's capability or power of will. Thenceforth the widow would no more send her son out with the milk, and went forth with it herself; while he, recognising the responsibility of his seventeenth year, toiled on unceasingly at his books, now his own tutor, but making occasional reference to the old schoolmaster, whose curriculum he had finished. There, in the cottage, under the red tiles and the ivy, by the little window embowered in the honeysuckle, he plodded on day after day, preparing himself for the battle of life, proud of the title of "student" bestowed on him by his mother, mindful of the things and terms of her dead brother; and although anxious ever as to his preparedness, Willie, withal, was contented and happy.

The widow on her daily round with the milk saw the sweet girl, Lizzie Mowat, and opened her heart towards her, seeking to take her into its warmth and tenderness. If her own little girl, whom God had taken so early, had been spared, would she have been beautiful and gentle as Lizzie? She thought she would. What daughterless mother of a dead girl-child would not think so? And the soil-bedaubed woman yearned towards the girl as she heard the sharp tones of her mother, commenting on the scouring or the dusting of

the door-mat. The widow also brought flowers in token of amity.

"They are very pretty; thank you, thank you."

"Will missie not come to see William's annuals? Baby can see the cow in its own little house, and perhaps get a cup of milk."

And the sickly boy said, "Yes, yes, Lizzie, take me."

So one bright afternoon Lizzie turned into the field with her burden, and the little dog barked, and the widow came out to call off the doggie. She warmly welcomed the girl, and took the little boy with smiles and caresses, and went into the old cottage with him, followed by her visitor.

"My! there is Billie B. at his books."

The visitor sat down as invited, but was instantly up again examining the books—books of Latin, and books of Greek, and books with curious plates that were not pictures, and full of figures. Of all these she could make nothing; but on the table she found the "Queen's Wake," and the first line she read struck the secret chord of her soul—"Bonny Kilmeny gaed up the glen."

The annuals were admired, and a nosegay gathered; the feeble child crowed at the cow, and was set on its back, and handled its horns, and drank a cupful of its milk; and Lizzie went home with her burden and her book. It was a pleasant hour, for which, through the cheerfulness and gentleness of the widow and her son, she had forgot her daily task of work and the shrill voice of her mother. And from the book her mind

found a new pleasure. Kilmeny and fairy life were a new revelation. True, she had had some inkling of fairydom, but coupled with vague fears. Now a world of pleasant purity and most pleasant sadness was opened to her, pure and beautiful, and in harmony with her own strange fancies ; and she often wished herself there when her mother scolded. And she dreamed of it under the apple-tree at dewy morning before her mother was up ; and again down the lanes and in the wood when she went forth with Johnnie ; and again under the tree in the twilight, when the shadows aided her strange imaginings. The old tumble-down cottage of the widow, too, took some new colouring from her dreams. Was it not in fairyland, and full of fairy promptings and light and brightness ? And week after week found her with her weakly charge, sitting in the cottage with Billie B., or loitering on the grass-plot admiring the silky-skinned cow, which undoubtedly had much of fairy in it too. The widow loved the girl ; and William did not grumble although interrupted in his study.

The apples had disappeared from the trees, the flowers had mostly faded from bank and hedge, even phantasy was fading in chill nights and frosty mornings. October had come, and William Black must go forth to meet fate in the bursaries' competition at Aberdeen. And Aberdeen was so far away as to seem to the widow and her friend Lizzie, and to the lad too, wrapped in the mystery of all lands unknown. He was going pro-

vided with one solitary pound note, the charge of which was an anxious affair, as serious almost as the hazards of the competition. With the pound he was to defray his passage from Inverwick to Aberdeen, 5s., for he travelled "in the steerage;" 1s. 6d. for the porterage of his box from the steamer to the Auld-toun; 5s. 6d. to cover his lodgings and food through the competition-week; and the balance was to freight him home if God prospered him not. Thus was his scrip scrimply furnished. He had not two coats. Often did the widow urge him to beware of thieves; as also of a certain wicked porter at Aberdeen, who there had defrauded the scholar's uncle on his first landing. The fraud lay in charging half-a-crown instead of 1s. 6d. for the carriage of the lad's trunk—a shameful and nefarious wrong, regard being had to the value and paucity of the student's shillings.

Lizzie bade William Black good-bye, and hoped he would win a big bursary, and not come back for long; and he, looking into her sweet face, fancied he was certain of success; and her sweet smile haunted him all through the dull dropping night, as he sat beside his mother in the carrier's cart to Inverwick, or walked by the cart-side to shake off the drowsiness that crept on him at times. And at early morning he went on board the steamer with his mother's blessing and the pound intact, and "went down into the sea" and was sick. But he won no bursary in the competition; and, I doubt not, he wept bitter tears for his discomfiture. He came

home very humble and shame-faced, feeling much as if he had committed manifold crimes. His mother met him at Inverwick. She also was sadly dispirited; but again she blessed her son, and thanked God who had restored him to her; and dully, drearily, they took their way home, all their high hopes vanished, the black night through which they wearily trudged seeming a true figure of their blighted prospects. The delivery of the milk next morning was a sore task to the stricken widow, who shrunk from the lukewarm sympathy expressed for "her laddie's failure." But to Lizzie she brought a monthly rose, "the last flower of their garden;" and said, "Willie was very dowie and downcast, and might be encouraged a bit if Miss Mowat would kindly see him."

But when the widow was gone, Mrs. Mowat broke out, "I'll no lat ye gang traiking aifter the lazy neer-do-weel. Widow Black 'll fin' oot her mistake afore she dees, breedin' up a lad to idleness and book nonsense, instead o' makin' him dig and delve. If the lazy lout was mine, I'd gar him wark I'se warran' ye. Ne'er a fut o' ye'll gan near.—Deil ha'e ye! Canna ye see the parritch-pat forenent your een, but be skailling the meal that gait, ye senseless hizzie!" and she shoved her daughter in anger from the porridge-making.

So Lizzie Mowat did not see William Black on his return, and the widow, offended, did not again invite her. And, after a few weeks, William went to teach

in a respectable family in a distant parish. "God had opened a door for him," the widow said, both in pride and gratitude.

It was August of the following year when he returned to the village. He had grown into a handsome lad, and was well dressed, and had the carriage and bearing of "a gentleman;" so all the villagers thought. In truth he was a comely lad; and his simple dress, bought with part of the gains of his nine months' teaching, looked well indeed. The widow was inordinately proud of him, and no doubt hugged him often in maternal transports in being thus restored to her. He was to stay till October, and then again to venture to Aberdeen. Mrs. Mowat and her daughter saw him at church. He too saw Lizzie. She had grown into a young woman, but she was thin and pale, and her face lacked that animation which had shone in her smile into the student's heart when last he saw her.

Mrs. Mowat was furious in her abuse of the "upstart gerd'nar."

"Gude save us!" she said, "I cudna mak oot wha the callant was, wi' his braw suit o' blacks, an' carryin' a numbrella no less—springan' oot o' the dunghill lik' ane o' his faither's rhubbrubs," and so on she railed.

The mason bade her hold her peace.

"There's much to be praised both in the widow and her son. If you have the sense of a mother, you'll bring up my boys much the same way. But you'll never do it. You'll gird them to carry and build, and

grind their young lives out of them, as you're doing now to Lizzie."

"Gude save the man's judgment, and mine tae!" she hissed. "If it wisna for ma thrift and ma thrivan', and the bawbees I brocht ye, whaur wad ye be the day? But o' coorse, o' coorse, ye're nae behadden tae prudence or thrift or raison. Na, na; and A'm, tae be sure, grindan' Lizzie's life oot, 'cause she's no lat gang traikin after the lik o' this upstart callant. And, nae doot, ye're sair hadden doon tae, puir man, that ye're nae lettan be in the public ilka nicht o' yer life! But dinna ye lose yer poor raison a'thegither. I'll sune be oot o' yer road, an' I wish I was, to yer great relief—yer great relief."

At this stage the mason, as usual, took himself off from the contest and the house, leaving the woman raging. Such scenes were not unfrequent. Lizzie, poor thing, sat silent and pale; but, as soon as she could without challenging remark, she went to her little crib upstairs, where she had a quiet cry. When she had recovered composure and bathed her eyes, and prepared to return to the sitting-room, she found herself saying, "I wish, I wish he may get a big bursary, and lots of prizes, and be a gentleman. I do wish it, poor Billie B." It is really a dangerous game for mothers to rail beyond reason against promising and interesting young men.

A few evenings thereafter, it happened that the mason was sent for to the inn by no less important a

functionary than the Earl's factor, and employed to estimate the cost of building a bridge and approaches on the new avenue to the castle; and he was specially enjoined to forward the estimate by the next evening. And the plans and specifications having been delivered to Mowat, the factor entertained him with a glass of toddy. But Mowat stayed after the factor was gone, his friend James Moffat, cattle-dealer at Braefoot, being at the inn, and increased his quantity of drink by several glasses, and then went home to his wife in the highest spirits and at a late hour, elated by the drink, and by this testimony to his ability implied in the factor's business. Mrs. Mowat had always sense enough at such times to hold her peace, it being dangerous, as she knew, to assail the mason when in liquor. Besides, she always had compensation when next morning she attacked him, dispirited after his carouse, and conscious of wrong-doing. On this occasion the morning brought the usual sequel—the mason downcast and apologetic; he "could not get away from Moffat, having to talk to him of the renewal of some bills," while his wife was sharp, shrill, abusive, vexatious, and triumphant, and Lizzie sad and pale—paler than usual. The mason at length unfolded the plans and papers, and sat down to work, but found himself utterly incompetent for the necessary calculations. He tried various expedients to bring himself into working condition—all in vain were bitters, salt herrings, and strong tea. He gave it up at length, and went out to bespeak the aid of the school-

master, his usual assistant in difficult calculations. The schoolmaster could do nothing for him till evening, but recommended him to William Black, the student, an excellent arithmetician and writer, as the old man alleged; and Mowat directed his steps to Widow Black's cottage. William readily agreed to help Mr. Mowat in any way in his power, and noon found the mason and the student in the mason's parlour, hard at the plans and specifications. The mason was delighted with his assistant's ready figures and neat handwriting, and declared that he was born "a ready reckoner." The lad went home to dinner at two, but was speedily back after his meal; five o'clock saw the work finished, neatly copied out and despatched, and William Black "must stay to tea."

Lizzie's heart had all that day been throbbing with pride and pleasure, because William Black was serviceable to her father, and she had smiled her sweetest smile when she brought water and glasses to the parlour in obedience to her father's call.

"How are you, Miss Mowat?" said the young man, rising from the papers to shake hands with her.

"Nicely," was all she answered, but her heart was full of tender and kindly words; and her smile came to him like one of his early dreams of literary distinction and collegiate success.

But Mrs. Mowat sourly sneered all day. "Ma husban' has surely gane gyte, when it is a schuleboy he has to guide his wark. Ma certy, if it's on the like

o' him that brig-buildin' is to depen', brig-buildin' wad better gang out o' fashan."

But when the mason, in his most peremptory way, said to her, "Master Black is going to take tea with us. Get the nicest cakes and some eggs, and have them ready in the parlour in half-an-hour. We're going for a walk"—she received the order in silence. They had scarcely left the lobby, however, when her hands were upraised and her eyes contorted, and she was exclaiming, "Set us a' up! The parlour na less for the gerdnar's son. The man's dementit." She obeyed the order, notwithstanding, and the appointed time found the mason, his wife, and guest in the parlour, and the tea-tray duly garnished, but provided with only three cups.

Lizzie brought in the tea-pot and set it down, and was leaving the room when the student spoke out. "You are not going away, Miss Mowat? I hoped to have tea with you; I won't enjoy it otherwise."

The girl was standing grasping the handle of the door-lock, blushing and "like to drop upon the floor" with the vexatious thought that the lad saw "how she was kept under at home." Her mother screwed her hard face, but did not speak.

Mowat said, "Bring a cup for yourself, Lizzie dear. Let the bairns take care of one another—no fear of them for a while."

When she was gone for the cup, and William had said that she had grown very tall and was thin and pale, Mowat took pains to explain, while his wife had enough

to do to suppress her anger, that Lizzie was needed for the children and the house, as her mother thought it right to do without a servant lass, much against his (the mason's) will, for he knew that Lizzie was delicate, and that it was not the right thing to make her a household drudge.

Mrs. Mowat could not forbear muttering, "Ye're the man that never thocht it wrang for me to be a household drudge, or ony ither drudge."

But Lizzie came in and they had tea, and William Black chatted and made fun, and mollified even Mrs. Mowat, so far as that was possible. And in course of his talking, he trysted to walk out next evening at four with Lizzie and Johnnie, and the parents heard it and did not object. When the little party broke up, I fear that Lizzie in her heart was calling him "Billy B.," and rhyming it with little words of love, the silly girl. And he—his head was turned by her beauty and gentleness. So they met and walked occasionally thereafter, until October came again, and William again went by sea to Aberdeen, this time a cabin passenger. And he achieved great success. Was it not in the Inverwick newspapers? Did not Mrs. Mowat, with a grudging heart and disappointed grin, read it herself? "William Black took the second bursary of the year;" and as the papers truly observed, he thus had beaten the whole world except the first bursar, for the whole world had been invited to compete. Mowat was delighted, for he had come to think highly of the lad; and he went to the nursery to

congratulate the widow; who, now seeing of the travail of her soul, received his compliments with a courtesy proper to the mother of so distinguished a son. Lizzie also stole up to the cottage to say how glad she was; but the widow chilled all the girl's warmth of feeling, saying, "It's a fine thing, Miss Mowat, for him to be successful, poor lad! and it's happy I am to have such a son; but, in the time of his adversity for ten months, you never darkened my door." But when she saw the whiteness that paled the lassie's cheeks, she more kindly added, "I'm not angry, though, Miss Lizzie; I'm lonely and want you to come to see me, and Willie will be pleased to hear you came just now." Lizzie could not tell why it was that she had not come—nor say that her hard and grudging mother had forbidden her visits.

In November little Johnnie fell ill, and his illness was even unto death, but he lingered until the long dreary haunted nights were longest and dreariest in December. In his illness they watched him for weeks, thinking every night might be his last. And as he still lingered, Mrs. Mowat made her arrangements; she would watch from the usual family hour of rest, ten o'clock, until three of the morning. Lizzie was then to be aroused to watch till daylight, with strict injunctions to call the household if there were signs of the coming change. The mason remonstrated.

"It is not fair to make a poor child, who never saw death, watch for its coming in this way. We have

plenty means, woman. Get some of the neighbours to watch the boy. Don't put it on Lizzie."

"I'll no hae a hirelin' to watch ma deein' bairn."

Nor did she; for the mason had to go away to a distant job, and was absent for a few nights, and when he returned he found his wife's arrangement in operation. The father said—

"Lizzie, dear, this is hard on you."

But she meekly answered—

"No, father; I feel no hardship, if only I could ease or strengthen our poor dear Johnnie."

And she sat through the eiry, weary mornings, the chill, shadowy, shivering mornings, watching the brother who lay pining, now restless, now dwining, in moanful slumber; and she grew thinner and paler as the mornings passed. But one morning, as the wind surged in fitful howls along the snow-clad village street, and the drifting snow beat on the pattering creaking window, there was a crash and a heavy fall within the sick-room. Lizzie's mother had put her up as usual, and had left her, and had undressed, and getting into bed had awakened her husband. They heard their daughter's footsteps in the room over-head, as if going from the fireplace to the sickbed—then came the crashing fall. Husband and wife sprung wildly out of bed and rushed upstairs. They found poor Lizzie stretched on the floor, apparently lifeless. The father raised her in his strong arms, and put water on her face and palms, but she revived not; and he broke out in a burst of grief, calling

on God to help him. His wife came with whisky to rub on her brows; but he, with clenched teeth, ordered her away.

"Woman," he said, "this is your handiwork. My loving daughter! You have crushed her to death."

But it was not death just yet. She revived, and the doctor came to her. He said Mowat was quite right. She had certainly been overtasked and overstrained. She must have entire relief; plenty of nourishment and stimulants in the first instance, and afterwards amusements, if possible. It was a nervous ailment, he thought. He could detect no serious affection; but too surely Lizzie had sat in the region and valley of the shadow of death, and the shadow had chilled her young life at its roots. But yet she bloomed awhile with increased beauty and fragrance.

CHAPTER II.

FEBRUARY found Lizzie still feeble, but enjoying all the luxury of convalescence. Her father daily came to her with kisses and kind words; her little brothers ministered to her assiduously; even Mrs. Mowat was softened, and never spoke above a shrill whisper, being now fully aware of the evil that her short-sightedness had wrought. The mother's grudging and niggardly housewifery had never been the result of necessity, and the mason was now in the full tide of prosperity. That morning's misery, her lifeless daughter, her husband's bitter words, the doctor's distinct statement of the cause, and his peremptory injunctions for the girl's future treatment, had completely routed the mother's notions of thrift and economy. Now Lizzie was lying indolently on the sofa, wrapped up in rugs. The sofa was a new one, bought specially that Lizzie might lie on it before the blazing parlour fire. It was in February—the month of valentines—and was there anything surprising that so pretty a girl as Lizzie Mowat should receive a valentine? Yet one delivered to her now did excite her a little, I fear, even before she had extracted it from its embossed envelope. The post-mark was "Aberdeen." It must be from Billie B.: she knew no one in Aberdeen excepting Billie B. Trembling a little, she opened it. It contained not a painted goddess, but a perfumed note containing the following:—

" Of love I am declining, I
Can, in my sad predicament,
Nor eat, nor sleep, nor aught but sigh,
For feverish feelings in me pent.
A restless, undefined desire ;
Fear freezing cold, and hope's fierce fire ;
And fancies, wild beyond control,
Cheat my weak sense and craze my soul.

" And thus it is when dawning day,
To the black clouds piled o'er and o'er
Gives feeble tinge of darkling gray,
Floating my half-oped eyes before,
An Angel form from out the gloom,
Stoops o'er my bed, flits through my room ;
Then melting in the brightening day,
Smiles in my face and flits away.

" Oppressed I seek the dawn. The fair
Flowers greet with grateful tears the sun :
The lark sings joyous songs ; the air
Wafts indolent the perfume won
From fragrant hill and dale. I ope
My soul to all this joy and hope
Of morn ; but downcast then I see
Such joy and hope are not for me.

" Shunning my thoughts, I seek the place
Where busiest crowds shall pass me by.
With heedless eye and reckless pace
I go—but I unconsciously
Gaze on a female form—and, see !
My loved one's face appears to me :
I know 'tis but a vision fair,
Yet, phantom-struck, I stand and stare.

"Thus haunted and excited, I,
With aching heart and jumbled brain,
To learnèd books for refuge fly,
But here am victimised again!
My books I cannot read; I hear
Low silvery tones pulse in my ear.
In gentle love-note thrills the voice,
And I, in mid-day dream, rejoice.

"The tender eve; the pensive air
With perfume thick; the cooing dove;
The stillness of the earth; the fair
Stars' gentle shimmer, cannot move
From me my mind's turmoil. My heart
Still beats with fitful pause and start;
And, in the beauty of the hour,
My passion ever swells the more.

"Devotion surely will repress
The surging of my troubled soul—
I bow me at the throne of grace,
Ah, no! it is beyond control.
I think of love divine—but 'Love'
Banishes thoughts of grace above,
And rears an idol and a shrine
Vested with grace more than divine.

"Drink, drink, my soul, the philtered cup,
Which love-born fancy holds to thee;
And keenly gulp the opiate hope
Of joy—which yet perchance may be—
Till bounding heart and reeling brain
Give me my visions o'er again;
While sleepless night and feverish day
Consume my dreamy life away.

"B. B."

It was only an exercise of the student, as any one might have seen from its struggling yet ambitious lines and broken metres, and its total inapplicability to the circumstances of the writer and recipient, and the season of the year. But to poor Lizzie it was a sign and a seal of the fact that he was dying for love of her.

"Poor Billie B.!" "dear Billie B.!" she said over and over again, as she thought of him consuming in his strong and burning affection. And she must needs write to him, if only some little word.

"Just one line," she said; and she got her pen and her paper, and betook herself to the unwonted task. What was she to say? She found she could write nothing, and still in her heart and on her lips were these words of love—"Poor Billie B.!" "dear Billie B.!" and she sat and pondered and repeated them until there grew on the paper before her

"Dear Billie B.—L. M."

Then she folded the sheet of paper awkwardly, leaving its tough folds uncrushed; and she addressed it in a large, unformed, and scrawling hand, "Mr. William Black, King's Colledge, Aberdeen;" for so the word "college" commended itself to her suppositions of orthography. So far she had overcome her difficulties, but how was it to be posted? She had no penny. She sat tired in mind and feverish in body. She could not ask her mother for a penny, or to get the letter posted for her. She had not yet forgotten the old scowl and scoff, and still dreaded them. As for her father, why,

her cheeks just then were crimsoned with maidenly blushes, as she thought of her father and his loud laugh, so kindly but so mocking withal. While thus she lay tossing and excited on her sofa, her father and James Moffat from Braefoot came in, and after enquiries as to her health, Moffat sat down, and the mason produced his bottle, and they had a dram and bread and cheese from the cupboard; and they fell to talking of bills and renewals of bills, and of sundry contracts in which Moffat stood as surety for performance by the mason. Then it occurred to Lizzie, irritated by their loud voices, that Mr. Moffat might post her letter. So when her father went for water to mix with their second dram, she took the opportunity to tender the missive to Moffat.

"It is just a shabby valentine," she said, "because William Black sent me one. Will you kindly post it? I don't want mother to know."

She looked very lovely in her blushes as the cattle-dealer gazed hard at her, and said quietly, "Yes, yes, Miss Lizzie; A'll post it for ye. But if ye're thinkin' o' the lads, just haud oot ower yonder to the Braefut, an' ye'll hae a gude steadin' ony day ye like."

His eyes were steady, and earnest, and grey, as they always were. Poor Lizzie fell back on her pillows speechless; but speech was not needed, for her father came back with the water, and Moffat slipped the letter into his pocket, and after their second dram they went out. That evening the doctor, looking in to see

how it was with his patient, found her in worse state than a month before.

Now James Moffat was a bachelor, forty-six years of age, tall and gaunt of figure, very straight brown hair, grey eyes, large mouth drawn straight across his thin and tawny face, with a protuberant nether jaw and chin partially, but almost constantly, wrapped up in a red handkerchief with white spots. Starting in life with some knowledge of cattle, and a ten-pound note hardly won as a ploughman, he had gone on dealing in cattle, "trocking" at the first, but dealing extensively as he won cash and credit, until now it was reputed he "was worth thousands." Certainly he was tacksman of a large farm at Braefoot, which had long been mismanaged and well nigh run-out, but which he had well stocked and cultivated, enjoying all the advantage of a moderate rent. With much shrewdness in his calling, and a capacity for keen and hard bargain-making, he combined a frank and open-handed manner, and a temperate good-nature. Thus, while he had made money by his hard dealing, he had not refused the use of his name on the bills or obligations of his acquaintance who needed temporary assistance. He had often helped Mowat the mason in this way—so often, indeed, that it had become a thing of course that when Mowat undertook a contract in which a "cautioner" was required, James Moffat, tacksman at Braefoot, was the usual security. Had James Moffat, who had gone on living a bachelor life in the

dilapidated steading at Braefoot, eating sparingly and in discomfort his ill-prepared meals, ever thought of matrimony, or ever looked on this puling girl Lizzie as a possible spouse? I cannot tell. I believe not until that luckless little note, which was meant to certify another of her affection, was slipped into his hand; and then, certainly, it did occur to him that Lizzie Mowat was a pretty girl—very pretty; in fact, such a girl as he might be proud to see at his side at kirk or market; and, with his prompt business habits, he no sooner thought so than he resolved to have her for his wife. Failure in this never occurred to him; and as he went homewards in the drizzly night he turned over and over in his mind all the advantage and comfort and pleasure of the marriage. To do him justice, too, he thought of her weak health, and pleased himself with the notion of petting and pampering "the dear lassie;" and as he got under his thatched roof, and into his dirty smoky room, he thought how nice it would be to come home of nights to that pretty one; and, then and there, he resolved to have a new house.

Next morning the visions and resolves of the preceding night were still strong in James Moffat, and while he went about, seeing after the ploughmen, and through the feeding byres, he was busily occupied with thoughts of Lizzie, and all that he should do and enjoy when she was his wife. He made up his mind that his scheme—not his "wooing"—he had no notion of wooing—should make progress before the day was

done. He gulped down his porridge and ate his eggs earlier than usual, while he complained loudly of his servant lass, blaming her in the most snappish way; and then he went briskly off towards the village, feeling much as he usually did when he set out to conclude an important bargain, with prospect of much profit. Ten o'clock found him at the mason's door. Now, as he approached the village, it occurred to him that his errand was not precisely of the usual matter of bargain. "Lizzie was not a quey to be sold off-hand to the first dealer that offered;" so he thought; and he had a dim perception of difficulties ahead as he traversed the long village street, and actually his heart was beating when he knocked with his stick at the door. While he stood waiting till some one came to him, a mocking devil suggested that the true thing to do was to ask if they had a quey named Lizzie to sell. But the servant lass came. "The maister's out, and Mrs. Mowat is washin'," said she; "but ye can see her if ye lik'; and the farmer went into the kitchen. Mrs. Mowat was up to the elbows in soap-graith rubbing away briskly.

"Deed, Maister Mowfat, ye're gey early in the toun; and yet ye're late for the gude man. He's aff to the workmen at Knockdry twa hours syne."

"I cudna bide at hame," he said, "I'm downright miserable yonder. Last night the rain cam' in through the roof o' ma auld biggin', and nearly soakit me in ma bed; and the smoke the morn was eneuch to shut oot

the daylight. I maist think I ate soot-stour for porridge. It's i' ma thrapple yet."

"Ochanee," groaned Mrs. Mowat; "ye're in a bad way, man."

"Am jist that, and am no mindit to stan' it langer. The Earl is bound to build gin I quarry and drive, and I'll no stan' it langer; so I cam' to tell the mason to mak' me plans for a new hoos."

"Ye're quite right, man. Why shud ye be burrowin' in a bothy when ye hae the ways and the means, Maister Mowfat, why shud ye? Ma man 'll be gey weel pleased tae dae the plans and the wark baith, and it'll be weel his pairt, I ken, tae dae them baith weel and cannily."

"While she was speaking, the farmer was thinking of the little girl, and it was in his heart to say, "Mrs. Mowat, will you give her to me," but he could not say it; the words stuck somewhere down his throat, while the same mocking devil again whispered in his ear—"Say you want to buy their white quey Lizzie; say it, man;" and this so confused his brain that he did not note what Mrs. Mowat said, and he felt himself perspiring, and took off his hat and wiped his forehead, and so went off, saying "the room was gey hot." At the door he met the doctor, who spoke to him. Then he recollected that he had not inquired for Miss Lizzie, and he asked the doctor how she was. The doctor said she was far from strong and was very nervous, and that he did not expect she would be stronger until she went out a little.

"For instance, in such a morning as this, a drive would do her good."

"A drive!" said Moffat.

"Yes, it would brace her up, no doubt," said the doctor.

"They have no machine."

"None," said the doctor; "and that is just my difficulty," and he went into the house.

"No machine! Faith, I'll buy ane!" and forthwith a brilliant vision arose to him of a one-horse dogcart conveying him and the object of his desires in pleasant speed over roads unknown.

He went out into the village street, and was entirely conscious of his failure, for the imp was telling him that "he hadna pluck to buy or even bid for the bonny quey." He walked down to the inn, but refused the landlord's offered dram; and by-and-by he found himself at Braefoot again. There he saddled his horse, and was presently on the way to the factor's. He found the factor, and told him he was unable to live longer in that hovel of a dwelling-house at his farm. He would procure a plan, and quarry and cart the stones, if the proprietor made arrangements to build. The factor was an easy man, of pleasant modes, conversant with the lives of men like Moffat.

"What ails you, James, at the house? You have grudged the labour for eight years and remained in the old house; what has set you against it now?" Moffat repeated the story of the rain and the smoke.

"Nonsense!" said the factor, "the house was not worse last night than many nights before. Are ye thinking of marriage, James?"

The cattle-dealer blushed—"Weel, if I did," he said, "it's no afore time, sir. If I got a richt lass tae tak' me, I guess I'd be a hantle better for't."

Whatever might be his object, the factor told him that the Earl was bound to build, on Moffat providing the materials, and that arrangements would be made without delay. Another hour found Moffat at the Lowes, bargaining for Mr. Morris's two-wheeled dogcart, which was to be discarded for a four-wheeled conveyance. He bought it for £12, and then he rode again to the village, entirely satisfied with the progress of the day, and silencing the imp that kept upbraiding him with cowardice in the matter of the quey. He had a dram at the inn this time, and then went home, chuckling in his heart at the train of circumstances he had arranged. He had distinctly set his heart on an object, and dimly fancied a way to its possession. Alas! poor man! are your dreams of happiness, and willingness to do aught to win it, anything other than a miserable storing up of grief and bitterness? Lizzie's coffin-lid too plainly told us that it was so.

William Black was in the chemistry class-room when the janitor brought the billet which Moffat had posted, and which, it will be remembered, was addressed to the college, and not to his lodgings. He was seated several benches back; and so the letter was handed

from one quizzing youngster to another, till it was put into his hand with the remark, "Gulielme Niger, a billet-doux from your washerwoman's daughter;" and there was a general titter.

The writing might have supported the impertinent allegation, and Black, proud and sensitive, blushed as he thrust it into his pocket. When he got home and opened it, did his heart warm and glow while he read the little words "Dear Billie B.," as my heart did, nay, does now, as I repeat them? I fear not. Success and a little experience had greatly altered the lad. He had been to tea in several houses, and had actually danced and supped at a reverend professor's. He was great in debating societies. But all that had not contributed so much to the change as his friendship with Miss Polson, who owned half of College Bounds, and lived alone with her maid in the midst of the students, and gave tea-parties to the young men, and patronised them, and, it was said, suffered the smoking of her masculine friends in her apartments. She had made the acquaintance of Black, and the other night had had him to her house, and in the innocency and frankness of her thirty years had sat on his knee and called him a handsome fellow, and so forth; and had injected poison into his heart, and so disordered his brain. Thus it was that my Lizzie's little words of love found no sympathetic response, but annoyed him rather; stirring up memories of the tin-pail and milk measures,

which, although not intolerable, were more pleasantly forgot.

"Billie B., forsooth!" he said. "An educated girl would have admired the verses."

And he chucked the note into his grate. But a pang shot through his heart, for, as the burning billet blazed up, he saw the sweet face of the writer in the flame; and for a moment he was Billie B. again, and for a moment, too, he felt the lovingness of the writer. The vision departed, however, with the flickering light, and all thought of it was speedily buried in his Lexicon. Lizzie, poor girl, how different it was with her! How often did she read the student's valentine, and call him by the dear name she gave him long ago! Did she kiss the lines and print them on her heart? Ah, well, we all have had our times of loving weakness. Happiest they on whose souls loving impressions are not too deeply etched.

A month and more had passed. It was early April; and Mowat sat with his friend, James Moffat, in his dwelling-place at Braefoot. They were looking over the plans of the new house, and Moffat was liberal with his grog as usual. Hitherto he had confined to his own breast his desire to wed the daughter of his friend, and his reticence had strengthened his desire, which now was almost a passion in him. The stronger it had grown, the more had he shrunk from its avowal. He had feared to approach her, and dared not mention her name. He was sorrowfully convinced that the

whispering imp spake truly, "the pretty white quey was not to be bought;" and hitherto his provision of the dogcart had had no beneficial results. He had drunk an extra glass of spirits, resolved to break the matter to the mason as one of his objects in connection with the new house, when the mason himself turned the current of his thoughts away from the revelation, by asking the use of his dog-cart on an occasional day to drive out Lizzie. The farmer's hopes were all aflame. His heart was beating so that he feared his friend would hear it. With difficulty he contrived to say, "Ye—ye're welcome tae't for the sake o' the—the lassie—but the pownie is so little used tae harness, I maun—maun drive her masel—first ance or twice."

Then it was arranged that he should be at Mowat's door next day at noon, if the day was fine. What a night of exquisite anticipation was that for Moffat! What a rich reward his foresight in the matter of the dogcart had brought him! Wisdom in love was plainly the right thing. He would tenderly care for the girl, and would hap and screen her from every breath of wind. To have her, thus, beside him and under his protection, surely it was a foretaste of that happiness which his heart desired.

Next day, sharp at noon, he was at the mason's gate. He had driven proudly up to it, full of ardour and excitement. Mowat was at the gate, and, on the arrival of the curricle, shouted for Lizzie to come forth; and she came cloaked and wrapped up. But the horse, fretted

by the unusual harness, would not be stilled by his master's "Who-oa, who-oa," and kept plunging now forwards, now to the right, now to the left. When checked by the reins, he backed and dodged about, so that he was well-nigh into the windows of a house on the distant side of the street, when the nymph presented herself at the gate. At sight of her, Moffat, conscious that he appeared at disadvantage, plied his new whip with more force than discretion; and then the conveyance came plunging to the mason's door again, filling all with alarms or frets. With difficulty Mrs. Mowat, who had also come out, had, with many a "Losh save us, sic a brute!" got her trembling daughter seated beside the farmer; while the mason held the horse by the head. But no sooner was the beast set free than again he backed and plunged, and the mason was obliged again to seize him and to lead him along, while the village boys crowded and shouted, and all the slatternly matrons stood staring in their doorways. The mason ran so as to break the horse into a trot. When, at last exhausted, he let go the bridle, intending to climb to the back seat, the ill-conditioned brute went swiftly ahead, and he was left behind. Then Lizzie looked back, crying, "Father, father!" and saw him in the distance surrounded by the yelling boys, while the dogcart bore her and her muffled companion out of the street into the highway beyond. Now she had stipulated that her father should bear her company; and here was she carried away from him and home; and in her weakness

and sensitiveness she shrunk from her companion. Indeed, she was gravely discomposed. Moffat, on his part, was also "put out." He did not venture to speak. In fact, through the bad conduct of his horse and the excitement of his own feelings, he dared not speak to her, but with voice and whip he kept the horse going, and looked not to the right or left, earnestly desiring to do the driving well and safely. This he realised—his anticipated happiness on this occasion had been greatly exaggerated. On they went, each in silence digesting his or her own bitter thoughts, while the jolting of the dogcart pained the weak girl and made her head ache. But three miles of the road were soon passed over. They were at the church of Howe. Beyond it in the trees nestled the snug manse. And why did Lizzie start and utter a pained exclamation? She really was too weak for the hurry and scurry and roughness of this drive, and had been sadly jolted and pained; but they had passed two persons in the road, gaily chatting and laughing. They were William Black and Miss Rose, the minister's daughter; and perhaps Lizzie knew that Black had been at home for a week, and she had not seen him till now. Half-a-mile beyond the manse Lizzie faintly begged Moffat to return; and when he said, "Ay, jist when we get to the fut o' this brae," and cast a sidelong glance at her as he spoke, he saw her pale face wet with tears, and he wondered and sorrowed, thinking she was very ill. He stopped the horse instantly in order to return, but the untrained brute would not turn. There

was a repetition of the backing and the plunging, and Moffat had to get down and take the beast's head to turn him, and thereafter had to lead him by the bridle, for as often as he let the bridle go, intending to resume his seat, so often the beast did back or bolt, until the girl cried openly in downright fear. Thus the worthy man, in topcoat and spotted muffler, had to trudge all the weary miles back to the mason's door. Could any anticipation of happiness have turned into disappointment more vile? Moffat felt it at the time.

My good old sister and I had returned to our village home two or three days before this event, and from our cottage-window we noted the circumstances of this setting out and return. We visited the little girl that afternoon, and soothed her with pleasant words, and arranged that she should drive out with us in our pony-phaeton, and be no more exposed to the rudeness of James Moffat's horse. We did not know that Moffat would regard us as the cruel means of blighting his prospects of happiness and love. But so he did look on us. For in a few days he came to regard that drive as the great event of his life. According to all ordinary reasoning, he should have felt humbled both for himself and his horse. Yet had he a sense of success and elation: had he not been with this bewitching girl for full two hours—alone with her—her sole protector and solace? It was true that he had spoken not many words to her, his longest argument having been "Wheesht! be quate, dear Lizzie. There's no fear.

A'll jist keep his heid." But it must be remembered that love can elevate a sentence even such as that into the sublimity of spiritual intercourse. True it was, also, that he had trudged on foot and perspired; but that had left a sweet sense of suffering for her sake. Whatever way it came about, there was the fact: the incidents of the day had confirmed the farmer's love, and, what was more, had, in his own opinion, put him into the position of a professed lover. What strange beings we are! Who could have suspected a curious evolvement and exquisite phase of love under the spotted comforter and greasy brown topcoat of this man of drams and cattle-dealing?

My dear old sister is an indefatigable woman, always in quest of some object on which to expend her superfluous energies and ever-ready emotion. The case of Lizzie was important and providential; it gave zest to our return home; and to the young girl it was beneficial, for the quietude and gentle influences of our fireside, to which she was now daily transported, materially aided her restoration to health. She was very beautiful at that period. Slightly taller than the average size of woman, her every motion was full of natural grace. Her oval face was finely chiselled, and her transparent complexion, with a faint trace of damask on each cheek, made her lovely, even while it told of her inherent gentleness, sensitive nature, and weakness. Had I been a young man, I could—I would have loved and wooed her.

William Black came to see us soon after our return, and Lizzie was at our cottage. I fear he had postponed his visit to us, the kindly friends of his boyhood, unwilling to meet Lizzie, as he had omitted to call at the mason's house. We received him gladly, and invited him to tea on an evening soon after, and he left us much pleased with the improvement of his person and manners. That evening, my sister showed me the student's valentine, and told me she guessed the girl's deep love.

"Was a sweet young thing like Lizzie in love not the most interesting of objects?"

"Nay, old sis., I know not; I remember when you were breaking your heart for that most noble youth"—

"You are really provoking, P. F.," said she pettishly, "with your miserable disbelief in all true affection," but here our Lizzie came cloaked and bonneted to say "good-night" to sister, and that I might escort her to her father's door. On our way thither, in the twilight, I saw a gaunt form, a man muffled and topcoated, watching our way across the street. I had no thought of Moffat, or that green jealousy was sickening his soul.

Round our tea-table we gathered some of the young gentry of the district together, with our two village friends, and I watched the tender and changeful face of Lizzie as it followed Black throughout the evening. How bright it was while they alone were our companions, before the arrival of our more distant visitors! How she drank up all the utterances of that soft voice of his! How she brightened and sparkled with smiles

at his college wit! I knew she loved him before the tea-things came. Was her love reciprocated? I could not so easily judge of that. But when our young friends were mustered, it was clear to be seen that Lizzie did not engross all the lad's thoughts. He sported with Miss Rose; he gaily dallied with Jemima Maclean; and again with Mirabel Thomson he was full of drollery and anecdote. For Lizzie he had not many words; and I was angry with him as I marked the pained expression of her sweet face. Black's college friend, Tom Rose, was unable to bring back the smiles which I had so much admired, although, captivated by her beauty, he tried hard to do it. He came to me in the window, saying she was very pretty, but very dull. I bade him send his prattling chum, Black, to her, as he seemed to have a faculty of pleasing the girls. Then Tom, in secrecy, told me the story of the lady of College Bounds, and I thought Black, with all his ability, no better than a common flirt, and utterly unworthy of Lizzie's heart. But when I looked again, and saw that the silly thing could scarce control her emotion, I knew that her heart was not in her own keeping, and my soul was grieved.

Now Moffat, filled with bitter feelings of disappointment through our arrangement to drive out the dear girl, dared not whisper his love to human ear; but he found his tongue loose in warning the mason to take care lest "that canny auld nabob was wantin' the lassie for a wife."

Mowat, however, had no jaundiced jealousy to warp his judgment on this point, and with laughter he assured his friend that the suspicion was nonsensical.

"Who could dream of marrying such a child?" he asked. "She might be his daughter."

This was no comfort to poor James, who, judging others by his own case, firmly believed that I intended matrimony. Thus, he hung about the village; but, strange to say, he avoided the mason's house, possibly with an instinctive dread, lest, within its walls, his compressed longings should burst out. He sedulously watched the outgoings and incomings of the girl; and thus I saw his tall uncouth figure many nights, when, in the gloom, I went home with Lizzie. His conduct had one result which Mowat did not calculate on: it delayed his receiving a vast amount of comfort from an unlooked-for ally and friend of his suit in the person of Lizzie's mother. That worthy matron had helped Lizzie into the dogcart to Moffat's side on the eventful day of that ride, and had witnessed, with all a mother's satisfaction, the pair drive away. She did not see her husband running, "like a gouk," at the horse's head, otherwise, possibly, the pleasure might have suffered diminution. What she saw was her daughter, cloaked and wrapped up to a portly figure, seated by the side of the man who, she knew, was both rich and kindly; and in her heart she said they "wad mak a gude couple;" and she wished her daughter so much good luck. She had thought of it and wished for it repeatedly since

then, but Moffat came not near her until the night of our tea-party. Then he came in with the mason to see a change on the plans of the house suggested by the factor. They had a dram, of course, and Mrs. Mowat joined them in the parlour. She at once went at the subject.

"I haena seed ye, Mr. Mowfat, tae thank ye for yer kindness tae ma lassie yon day. Wey, man, ye was unco carefu' o' her, walkin' hame a' yon lang road wi' her. It's jist tae a canny man like yersel that the lik o' her ought to be lippened."

"I was gey and pleased haein' it in my pooer tae drive her," said he, wiping his forehead with his hand.

"Deed, man," said she, "whan I seed ye drive aff in the braw gig thegither, I cudna help thinkan ye wad mak a richt sonsy pair, and I wish it was the case nae less."

"Hold your tongue, wife," said Mowat, peremptorily. "Moffat is not a fool. He has gone through the world a deal further and quite as long as her father."

"O' coorse, o' coorse, I'm the fule; but what mair wad ony fulish woman want till her dauchter than tae see her mistress o' the fine new hoose at Braefut, wi' a kin' man lik James Mowfat to coddle and tak care o' her? Fule, indeed!" and she went out, banging the door.

Moffat's heart bounded at the discovery of this powerful ally; but, like a wise man, he was mute for the time.

Why did Lizzie Mowat sit at her window next day all the patient expectant hours till three o'clock, peering steadily through her narrow lattice, as if anxiously waiting for the coming of some one? Early in the day she had seen James Moffat pass into the house, but his arrival did not interest her, as she sat watching still. Ah me! had she known his errand, had she known that he had come to recur to those words of her mother, to pour out his longing earnest desire to get her—Lizzie Mowat—to nourish and to cherish, as his own for ever; had she heard him tell, with his dry soul staring out in those grey eyes of his, how he was building that new house solely in the hope that there she would dwell with him, and how he had bought that dogcart, in the expectation that therein he would drive her, and how his soul was not his own with longing for her; had she known that her mother was clapping the lank man's shoulder, telling him "tae keep up his heart blithely, for she wad dae ilka thing in her pooar tae get the lassie tae be his bonny bride, an' a braw bride I wot she'll be, man;" would she have been interested? Would no other feeling have aroused her poor palpitating heart than that which led her to watch there at the window with those liquid eyes of blue, intent on that dusty street? Would she not have shrunk and shrivelled like the sensitive plant which she so much wondered at in my glass-house; or, crushed by this astounding and unthought-of revelation, would she not have writhed in her spirit's anguish? Well,

well, how often do we escape misery by not guessing the evil thoughts of wife or husband, or parent or child? There she sat, merely snatching a morsel of her two o'clock dinner, lest the object of her watch should escape her. At length William Black passed by, going away from his mother's house. She had watched until he should pass by. Then she hastily dressed and went out, seeking the old cottage at the nursery.

The little dog barked, and the widow came forth and silenced it; and coldly, coldly she welcomed "Miss Mowat."

"A sight of you, Miss, might have cured my old eyes many a time through the lone months back, but an old body like me canna be looking for the company of young ladies."

The querulous tone smote Lizzie's heart more than the spoken words of reproach. She was going to say how long she had been ill and lonely and sad herself, or to aim at saying it; but the widow went on, "My young man has gone out and I kenna when he will come home." She said this stiffly, but her tone softened and her voice was broken as she proceeded. "He is much changed. He used to tell me his every outgoing, but he does not now. 'He must increase, and I must decrease,' but his mother's love is ever the same."

Then the girl sat down in the cottage unbidden, and the tears were quietly running down her cheeks. The widow saw this, wondering. "What ails you?" she said, still coldly; but the girl, with a sob, found words, "If you

knew how ill and lonely I was since Johnnie died you would not blame me."

Then the widow melted and took the maiden's hand, saying, she knew she had been ill, and feared that she must have been lonely, whatever comforts were around her. It was the lot of many women to be lonely. As for herself, all the long winter she had ailed without a comforter—her only companions the doggie and the old cow—and often she had longed for human sympathy, and pined till her son came home. Now, when he had come, he was no more the sweet all-loving boy whom she had nourished, but was self-engrossed and self-important, reckoning not his mother's heart for much among his idols; and, "Waes me!" she said, "he does whiles speak to the doggie, but he hasna gien a look to the coo." And the women were in tears together when William Black came in.

"Mother! Miss Mowat!" he said, perplexed; "what is the matter?"

"Nothing, nothing, Willie," said the widow. "I have not seen my pet lassie for weary months, and she has suffered muckle;" and they wiped up their tears while Black said, half-seriously, half-gallantly, that he must strive to comfort them both. Forthwith, as there was nothing to exhibit in the garden, he set to show Lizzie his prizes, and a number of new books—the poets chiefly—which he had brought home. And this led Lizzie to recollect his own poem, and to compliment him in her feeble way; and in downright childlikeness she told him

that after her illness it was the first thing that had filled her with new life and impulse, even while it took her heart away. Such were not her expressions. What she did say was in guileless, almost tearful little words that touched the lad's heart with their simple tenderness, while they aroused his gallantry and flattered his self-esteem. So he fell into the graciousness of the moment. He would give books to Lizzie. He pointed out and read droll things to her in his books. He talked of reading and walking with her. And when she had been brought round to laugh again, and the sweet old smile, and the light of her eyes had again shone into his mind, all the old feelings, stifled within him and buried under many burdens, came forth fresh and sweet from their concealment; and he told his mother, as if it were a thing that she could have forgotten, how the little girl, Lizzie Mowat, used long ago to call a certain little boy, "Billie B.," whereat the widow smiled, lovingly in her heart regarding that little boy. Now the name must be the family name. To mother and Lizzie he must always be, "Billie B." Dear me! All their tears were wiped away. The widow had found her son, the maiden was joyous over her recovered treasure, when my sister, Tabitha, walked into the cottage to find it luminous with love. Tabitha told all about it that night with much sympathetic pleasure. I suggested that the young man, impetuous and generous as youth is usually, without defined resolution or fixed affection, and not knowing himself, had, in momentary emotion, purposed what he

would not, could not, perform. My "perfidious distrust of affection," for so my sister styled my doubting, was denounced by her. I doubt not poor Lizzie recalled that afternoon among the bright hours, in her sickbed retrospect.

CHAPTER III.

YET that bright day was overcast. Mrs. Mowat was not a woman to allow the grass to grow on her paths; and from the moment when she pledged herself to James Moffat to do her utmost to aid him, she was restless till she found opportunity for action. Such opportunity was not long deferred, for Tabitha, walking with Lizzie homewards from the nursery, after that most happy interview, and strongly disposed to fall upon the girl's neck and kiss her in respect of the maiden's recovered happiness, went into the mason's house with her young friend, and there, meeting Mrs. Mowat, incautiously mentioned where she had found her daughter. My old sister had scarcely left them together, when the mother, with a mock curtsey to her daughter, commenced,—

"Jist sae, Miss, ye turn the laa o' natur' topsiturvie! Ye gang aifter this creatar o' a studdant sin' he'll na cam' tae ye. Ma leddy, ye'll miss mair nor ye'll catch that gait."

Lizzie said she had only gone to see the widow, not the widow's son.

"Noo, a wunner wus it a veesit o' chawraty, or are ye in real love wi' the dirty auld wife? She's a gey sleekit ane. Butter wadna melt in her mou'. Belik the son is muckle the same; an' nae doot ye'll get unco

sweet words frae ane an' tother o' them. But a guess, Miss, ye'd be a hantle nearer the mark gif ye helped yer mither whiles, 'stead o' glowerin' through the panes and glaikin' aifter thae gerdnar folk."

They were in the lobby, and the mother was talking with much bitterness, when suddenly William Black stood at the open door. He had come, in joyous spirits, to deliver to Lizzie her gloves, left behind in the cottage, neglected in her overflowing pleasure. He presented the gloves to the girl. Then, said Mrs. Mowat, with her hardest face—

"Aweel, Maister Blake, ye hae cam' hame frae the colledge. A's weel that en's weel, laddie."

"I'm thankful for the measure of success I have had," he quietly answered.

"Noo, gin a body mae speir, hoo muckle de ye gat frae the great colledge be the year?" she asked.

"No great sum, ma'am," he said; "and yet a large sum for me. Eighteen pound ten."

"Auchteen pun' ten!" she echoed, in that vilest of sharp voices. "Auchteen pun' ten! say ye? An' was that what a' the paipers mad' sic a yammerin' and clamour aboot. But ye ha'e surely yer meat an' claiddin' forbye."

Black was by this time fully aware that he was engaged with no friendly inquirer, yet he quietly replied—

"No, ma'am, the whole sum allowed by the college is what I mention; but it pays all the college charges,

and my board and lodging while there, and leaves me a pound or two over."

"Aweel!" she said, contemptuously; "I'd as lief ha'e ma sons at the plou' or the truel, wi' their wames fou, as at yer colledge wi' heads jamlin wi' book pride and toum stomacks, as yers maun be mony day, puir laddie;" and she went into the kitchen, adding, "James Mowat cud buy a score o' the lik o' him."

Black also disappeared from the door. For a moment Lizzie stood alone in the lobby, trembling. Then she followed her mother, and went up to her, and put her arms round her scraggy neck, and kissed her; and, looking straight into her face, said—

"Mother, William Black is climbing the hill as God leads him. Is it fair to cast bitter words in his path while he is struggling bravely?"

For a moment the woman was perplexed. She was not accustomed to have her violence thus met by loving action and soft words; but she thought that to yield would be to lose all hold over her daughter for the future: and family government must be carried on. So she parried this attack of love; and, as she put aside her daughter's arms, she said,—

"Are ye a fule, lass? Is it God that's fillin' the upstart skaimp wi' pride and vainety, I wonner? and dae ye ken hoo mony placks is in aughteen pun' that ye're dementit glowrin' at him? Tak' a care o' yersel', lassie."

"Mother," replied the girl, still standing straight up

and facing her, "his riches or poverty have nothing to do with your use of rude words to him. The world knows that he is doing rightly, and in the path to do better. Besides, he is my acquaintance and father's friend, and you have insulted him at your door."

She said it quietly, and simply, and firmly, and the right was distinctly on her side, and the mother, surprised at this exhibition of independent thought in her daughter, totally unexpected and entirely novel, did not venture to reply. Now, never before had Lizzie Mowat opposed words to her mother's speech or action, and she wondered at her own calmness and courage while she stood before her mother. For the first time she felt the power and state of womanhood, as she turned away and sought her little chamber. There, I fear, there was little trace of intrepidity in her trembling and tears.

After this Black did not call again at the mason's, but Lizzie met him almost daily for a fortnight at my cottage, and Tabitha drove them out together; but these pleasant days were interrupted. Black was appointed interim-master of the Inverwick Academy, where the teacher had fallen ill.

James Moffat's interests were not neglected during this time. He had had several long consultations with the girl's mother, who had told him how she "haed gien the loon a scunner o' oor door. I warran' I sent him aff wi' a flea i' his lug." But it was necessary to go on cautiously, she said; for the mason was proud and fond of his daughter, and anything like a rude approach

to her affections would "jist set his back up;" and so to begin the courting cannily she invited Moffat to tea.

"Me!" said the man; "A canna bide tea. A dunna drenk tea, and the mason kens it weel."

"Hoot, toot," said she, "ye maun learn tae drenk it. Ye'll ne'er be youngar tae learn. It's the ae road tae get speech o' yer dawtie; an' wi'oot speakan' a guess ye'll no com' muckle speed."

At tea-time in came Moffat, as if he had come by accident, and being invited to join in the repast, he at once consented, to the surprise of the mason, and had two cups of tea and many scones. Then he talked of his new house and how he would furnish it; for he "haed a few pun'-notes by his han', an' he wadna spair them," he said; and Lizzie must tell him how the houses of the grand folk were furnished, and keep him right in the matter. And Lizzie, always courteous and gentle, delighted him with her willingness to listen to him, and her promises of such aid as she could give, and by remarking that his future home would be "so nice." More in love than ever, he refused any drams, and went home sufficiently intoxicated by his tea. He came again and again to the mason's astonishment, drinking tea and still persisting in his abstinence from liquor. On the fourth occasion Lizzie was not at home, being at tea with us to meet Black, who was going to Inverwick next day. Moffat had brought under his arm a large and excellent work-box as a present for the young lady. It cost fifteen shillings sterling, he told

her mother. He was almost glad that she was absent, being thus saved the emotions attendant on the presentation. He was still more pleased to hear that Black was going away; and his pleasure was perfected by meeting Lizzie on the street next day, and being subjected to the sweetest of smiles, while she thanked him for the gift. Poor Lizzie at that same moment was not in the happiest mood. Black had been very pleasant and gay and amusing when with her since that afternoon. He constantly called himself "Billie B.;" but the love and tenderness that she longed for—a tenderness which would have sweetened the whole cup of her life, and for which through all her life she had yearned—were absent. He used not those little words of endearment that would have been precious to her; and now he was gone away.

As summer passed, James Moffat's capacity for tea was fully developed, and he became a bore unaccountable to Lizzie, who never harboured a thought that the man loved her otherwise than as the little daughter of his friend. She still had the belief that she was both very young and little. Her thoughts, too, were fully occupied by other objects than Moffat. She had not seen Black since he went to Inverwick, nor had she any letter or message from him. The widow told her that he was well and happy. He had come twice to see his mother on Saturday, getting a seat on the conveyance of a commercial traveller, led by business to our village. He had been mindful of his

mother, too, and had brought her a new gown and shawl and bonnet; and of the gown and shawl she was very proud, putting them on to show their glories to Lizzie; but of the bonnet she said, "Na, na, I'll no wear it. I have worn mutches ower lang tae feel comfortable with the like of a bonnet; 'though I'm very willing to please my lad." But for Lizzie she had no token of love, no little endearing message. It almost seemed to Lizzie that the widow was now so proud of her son that she thought he was too good for her young friend. With many a pang, too, Lizzie brought herself to feel and confess that he was too clever and great-minded and ambitious for her. What attraction had she to win or keep his affection? she painfully asked herself, forgetting her peculiar beauty and gentleness, which might have won, nay, which I am sure did win, the love of angels. Thus her heart was sore and aching; and she reckoned not of the lanky uncouth man who came every other night to her mother's tea-table. But in the end of June her mother broke the matter to her. For some time she had, in her shallow and hard way, been very affectionate to the girl, fawning on her with sugary words and cat-like caresses. "Ma dear!" and "Ma dawtie!" she constantly called her: and one evening, when Moffat had just gone out, she came leering and winking to her daughter, saying, "He's awfu' fu' o' luve for ye, yon puir man!" Lizzie did not comprehend, nor did she reply; and the woman continued—"He cam' tae me the morn, sayan' he'd gie

a' he haes o' the warld tae hae ye for his bonny wife. The foolish creatur'!" At once the whole truth flashed on the daughter. This was why Moffat had lately been there so often, and why her mother made so much of him, and why she had latterly been caressed. I have often wondered at the distinctness of perception, the clearness and purity of purpose, and the determination of manner exhibited by young girls in matters of sudden trial, wherein their inexperience and new and excited feelings might reasonably be expected to exhibit themselves in tears. Now Lizzie stood before her mother, calm and erect.

"Mr. Moffat told you so, mother! Did you tell him it was foolish beyond thinking, that it could never be, and that he must not think it?"

"Na-a, dawtie," said the woman, taking courage from the gentle tones of the maiden's voice; "na, dawtie, I tellt him naething o' the kind. Ye're a vera silly quean gin ye'll nae tak' James Moffat's head, and purse, and mailin' under yer oxter. Deed, faith, maist girls wad jump at the chance. Aith, I tellt him, dearie, he was blythe and welcome for me."

"Mother," replied the girl, "the man is older than my father. He is a worthy man, no doubt, and he has my best wishes. But, mother, I will marry no man for years to come" (was she thinking that Black could not marry for years to come?) "I never will marry any man for mere worldly comfort. I never can marry Mr. Moffat. Let there be no mistake between us, mother.

When next you mention his name to me with love or marriage, I will leave home. I am not strong, but I may be fit for some work, and may earn my bread. Does my father know of this?" she asked, trembling.

"Na, na, I didna tell yer faither. Yer faither's unco lik' his dauchter, a wutless body that canna see wi' een like ither folk. He kens naething o't ava. But he's much behadden to James Moffat, and I'se warran' he'd be a cruse man geif ye tak' his freend."

"Mother, I have said it can never be;" and Lizzie went to her chamber and wept bitterly.

On the night of the 15th of July, the new steading which the mason was building at Knockdry was burned to the ground. The flames were seen at the village at midnight, and the mason's family was aroused by tidings of the calamity. Knockdry is two miles off, but being situated on the hillside, the blazing pile was visible for many miles around. The mason and his wife hurried to the spot through the pelting rain and muddy ways. Little had been done, or could be done, to stay the progress of the fire; and at six o'clock next morning William Mowat, who was sole contractor, was seated at his fireside, still excited and bewildered by the night's occurrences, and fully persuaded that he was a ruined man. £600, he said, would not cover the loss. £200 would exceed all his available means, and he was sadly dejected. His wife, as usual, was louder and shriller than he, shrieking out curses on the workmen, whose recklessness had led to the fire; reproving the

mason, too, because there was no insurance. He made no defence, but bemoaned his poor children, and cursed himself, because they must suffer, and because "that friendly man, James Moffat, must lose money by him." Lizzie stood beside her father's chair, her hand on his neck, and she said, "What does worldly wealth or poverty signify while our father is spared to us?"

She was coughing, and her father for a moment interrupted his own grief, hoping that she had not got cold and wet in that weary night; and then James Moffat walked into the room.

"Speak o' the deil an' he'll come," said the wife. "I'm fearin', Mr. Mowfat, it's a black mason ma man 'll be till ye. He's clean brock and ruined noo, and he haes himsel' tae blame."

"He canna hurt me muckle," said the gaunt man, "gin I paid the haill loss. Hoo muckle may it be noo? I gaed ower it the noo, an' I thocht twa hunner nots wad cover it outside."

"Six hundred will be nearer the mark," groaned the mason.

"Na, na; I ken better. The haill contract was jist £650, an' the stable wusna roofed in, and the west side is vera little spiled; scaumed, nae mair; and the stanes are a' there ready to be biggit again. It's jist the laybur an' the wud, man. Twa hunner 'll dae it."

"But I'm not worth a rap. I'm a brocken man, James Moffat."

"William Mowat, ye haena the speerit o' a chicken, sittin' there coanan and groanan. The wark maun be dune ower again, and ye maun dae it. Get up, man, an' coont the cost, an' if ye need a hunner pun' or mair, I'll back ye for the siller. I ken ye're worth it a'."

And Lizzie stood by and heard the man's kind words and proposals; and she saw her father, as easily elated as dispirited, get up in newness of strength, and go out with his true friend, to set himself to the work of retrieving his misfortune; and knowing the secret of Moffat's love, her soul was pained for him, whose malady she could nowise relieve.

"That's the man ye wunna hae, ye senseless hizzie," said her mother.

Tom Rose was at Inverwick in August, and came home with news of Black. Miss Polson of College Bounds was at bathing quarters at Inverwick; and Black had constant meetings and junkets with the lady, so that the gossips of the town had occasion for much excitement regarding the young classical master. This news Miss Rose communicated to Miss Mowat at a casual meeting, with the additional information that the lady was worth just £200 a-year, and was forty years of age. As I happen to know that the last two statements were not exact, it is possible that in other particulars Tom's facts were not correct. But Lizzie Mowat felt sick on hearing it, and went home and coughed more, for she had not got over her ducking and chills on the night of the fire, and she was ill. Jealousy, I fear, was hard on

her. Was this old woman to carry off the one prize that would brighten Lizzie's life? Were there no means by which the evil could be averted? Lizzie could see none. Her future seemed a hopeless, dreary blank. Moffat still came for tea, never hinting at his love, but ever wistful to gain a smile from the girl, while she shrunk from him, notwithstanding all she knew of his goodness of heart. One evening she came not to tea. She was strangely tired and discomposed both in body and mind, and lay down in her room. Moffat, alarmed at her illness, and recollecting the doctor's prescription of a drive—the only prescription he recollected—recollecting vividly, too, that one heart-cherished drive of his, urged her mother to arrange that she, with her daughter, should next day accompany him to Inverwick, to which place he was going to ship cattle. But Lizzie was ill, and told her mother that night when she proposed it that she could not take advantage of Moffat's kind offer. And the mother was angry.

"If it wus the gerdnar's son, or that stuck-up auld body Miss Tabby, ye'd gang brawly oot, I ken; but wi' this man, whase haert is worth a dizen, wha's uphauding' yer faither's wark and credit, ye'll no gang. No, ye—ye Judas, wha wad betray yer ain hoosehald tae ruin and starvation; if the man war lik ither men."

Such was her good-night to her child; and the girl lay in her lonely little room awake for long hours, coughing in the darkness, and feeling that darker night which was besetting her soul through the loss of her

heart's idol; awake, too, with a dreary consciousness of coming evil, from which there was no deliverance; and of isolation and desertion like that of the drowning mariner alone in the surging sea. Towards morning she fell into uneasy slumber, accompanied by copious perspiration. But when she awoke the sun was shining brilliantly at her little window, and the old apple-tree, whose branches stretched to the window, looked glorious in the light, as it seemed to offer its golden fruits to her. Now her thoughts were more cheerful and hopeful as she dressed herself. If she went to Inverwick, she might see William Black, and possibly—possibly the evil she feared might not come to pass. She resolved to accept her mother's invitation to go to Inverwick, and she told her mother so at breakfast; but her cough was still troublesome. Her mother smiled her hard smile again, and her father kissed her; for he had seen Moffat there that morning enquiring if the ladies were to go with him, and had noticed his disappointment. Moffat, however, could not be far away, and little William was despatched to look for him, and quickly brought him back. So they would start at ten o'clock; and, no doubt, Mrs. Mowat took much credit, in a side conversation with the farmer, for the change in her daughter's resolution.

Then there was the hurry of preparation. The mother made the girl dress in her nicest things; and, not knowing why her daughter had consented to go, she promised to buy her a new bonnet at the town. Then

they would walk by the seaside, and see the steamer sail down the firth, and enjoy themselves very much. The drive and change would rout away the cough, and they would be early home. She wrapped her up too in her heavy cloak, and with rugs; and while she tucked up and pinned her haps, the sweetly-solemn face of the daughter had so much the semblance of a sacrificial victim, that the mother's heart was touched. Could she give her beautiful child to that uncouth cattle-dealer? But the hour was come, and Moffat drove to the door, and there was much the same scene of backing and plunging as before. At length they were seated, Mrs. Mowat on the back seat, her daughter in front with the man, and they set off. And the mother and Moffat kept up jocular converse, and the road was quickly passed over, and the manse of Howe was reached. Here the man produced a large packet of sweetmeats, and delivered it in silence to the girl, and was pleasantly thanked; and he was watching her use of them and neglecting his horse, when they came to the foot of the ascent of Knock Howe, three-quarters of a mile beyond the manse. The horse suddenly paused in his trot at this point, and Moffat thoughtlessly tugged the reins and cut with his whip, and then the horse backed. Mrs. Mowat screamed and jumped down from behind, for the ascent commenced with an unfenced embankment there about ten feet high. Still the horse backed. Moffat strove to undo the tightly-buttoned apron of the gig, but he could not; and he called to

the woman to seize the horse. Then Mrs. Mowat, with her parasol up and her shawl flying about, rushed at the bridle-rein, and in an instant horse and carriage were off the road and lying smashed at the foot of the embankment.

When Mrs. Mowat looked down from the roadside, the horse was quietly standing in front of the dogcart, but still attached to it by the traces. Both shafts were broken, and the box of the carriage was upturned. Lizzie was lying motionless, still enclosed, and held to her seat by the apron, while her head and shoulders were on the ground. Moffat was wriggling behind, but he was quickly on his feet, apparently unhurt. He uttered a yell as he came back to the motionless figure of his companion. "She's deed, she's deed," he cried, "an' it's a' my faut. It's me wha kilt her," and he was wringing his hands and yelling still when Mrs. Mowat came to him.

They raised the girl from the broken dogcart, and laid her gently on the grass and brackens, while the mother bade him "Stap yer screachin'. She's no deed. It's only a dwam lik what she haed at Christmas. It's mair my faut than yer's." And the woman undid the girl's haps, and she lay in the pleasant sunlight, her ashy cheeks contrasting strangely with her dark mourning dress. Moffat carried water from a pool in his hat, and her mother sprinkled her, and slowly, slowly life came back with faltering course. They were both stooping over her, when the first faint flush of

blood came to her cheek; and her breathing was still feeble and gasping, and her eyes were still closed, when she muttered, "Billie B." They did not understand or note it. And while each of them bent over her in bitter self-accusation, Tom Rose came strolling along, and, learning the facts, instantly ran home for his father's phaeton, and half-an-hour saw Lizzie, still faint and feeble, set down with her mother at the manse. There she was somewhat recruited, and Tom afterwards drove them home.

Lizzie was again put to bed, and again the doctor came to her. Her feebleness and considerable emaciation surprised him, and her cough soon caught his skilled ear. Why need we linger. Lizzie's lungs were affected by tubercle, and she was on her deathbed. Months of fancied improvement and real relapse intervened before they told her. And in long nights of hacking coughs and clammy perspiration, another lover sought and found her, a lover, nobler than the noblest of human ideal. So that when they told her she must surely die, life had ceased to be greatly to be desired. But her lively fancy and gentle spirit gave many happy tints to the past, and draped with brightness many days which had been dark enough in reality—days in which she had yearned to be loved, and loved and yearned in vain.

What have I been writing about for hours by the clock? The silly, uneventful life of a village girl,

gone to her rest in the churchyard. Only that. And what matters a village girl more or less? Well, not much, perhaps. But the humble wallflower yields richer fragrance than the rarest cactus; and a village life may evolve a sweeter memory than the biography of a prince.

THE BOURTREE.

CHAPTER I.

THE cottage stood with its gable to the street. It was old and dilapidated, the thatch overgrown with moss, and chickweed, and groundsel. A narrow lane led from the street to the humble door, and in the lane and opposite to the door, stood a well-grown, well-branched elder-tree—the "bourtree" of my story; and its branches overshadowed both the door and window. "Rickle-trickle-tick-rickle-trickle-tick" played the loom of the weaver who dwelt within, and the sounds were often uncertain, for both the weaver and his loom were old. "Rickle-trickle-tick" and "heu-heu-heugh," a dry hard cough, followed by the laboured breathing of asthmatic old age—came and passed out by open door and fast closed window, spreading a circle of ricketty sound round the stem and branches of the elder.

"Ye're hoastin' bad the nicht," said a woman, seated on a low stool in the trance. "Ye're hoastin' bad, weyvar! Tak' a moufu' o' het watter;" but she rose not to proffer the suggested palliative, and her voice

was sharp and unsympathising. She bore the look of age, but in reality had not passed her forty-seventh year. She was "ill put-on" and "ill-cleaned," and the appearances of age come early with ingrained dirt and poverty. She sat on her stool idly and with clasped hands, in thought apparently; and ever and anon her thin lips were compressed and her body quivered, as if she was inwardly shivering. Her head was a fine head, too; and her face had been handsome; but her arched aquiline nose had grown into a beaked and unpleasant feature, and her strong yet tapered jaw and chin seemed curving upwards to meet the nose. Her eye, once a flashing orb, hazel brown shaded into black, still shone, but cold and glassily, as she peremptorily repeated, "Tak' a drenk, I tell ye," as the "rick-trickle-tick" of the loom ceased, and the "heu-heu-heu-heuch-heuch" went on in severer fit than before.

The weaver left his loom, and filled himself a pannikin of boiling water. He took off his woollen night-cap for a moment as he reverently muttered to himself, "Lord, bless thy mercies!" He drank some mouthfuls of the water, and then he went into the trance and stood at the door. He was a tall and wasted man, large of bone and gentle of aspect. Ill-conditioned age had bleached his hair and puckered his face, but had not destroyed its pleasant expression. Bright shone the evening sun on the bourtree, and bright beams, escaping through the moving branches, filled the trance with quivering light.

"Ah!" said the old man, "It's a bricht evenin', an' the tree is brawer this year than ever! Five an' twenty year sin' ye planted it, noo, woman. A year aulder than oor Bella. Whaur's she noo? whaur's she noo? Oor little Bella!"

"Wheesht!" said the woman; "Ye always coun ower yer spilt milk! Gang in frae the win'." Very crossly and imperiously she spoke, and the old man sighed and went in at her bidding; and the song of the loom and his cough passed out to the tree as before.

The woman sat and rocked herself, moving her body with a stiffened monotonous swing, as she still sat with lips compressed and clasped hands. Was she also "couning ower spilt milk?" It was even so; for the evening and the shadows of the tree had recalled to her, before her husband spoke of it, the time, long ago, when the tree was planted—a time which had seen planted not the wand only which had grown into the tree, but roots of bitterness also which had grown up and overshadowed her life.

Who would have thought it? Twenty-five years ago the beaked beldame, now seated in the cottage door, was the brightest, blithest lass of the village. All the village swains and the country lads for miles around tried to square their shoulders, and marched less slovenly along when she was in the path; and a proud man was he to whom "out ower her shouther" Bella Lumsden gave a blink of those lustrous eyes. Daughter of the village bowman, she knew every soul in the village,

and was liked and made of by many. Even those who, envious of her personal charms or of her popularity, dared to depreciate her, could say no more evil of her than that she was "a pert cuttie," or "a saucy baggage." Foremost suitors for her favour were William Mowat, then a brisk mason lad, and James Bisset, the weaver, the latter a douce man, fifteen years her senior, and well favoured of her father, the bowman. Then, the cottage was new and trim; Mowat, in his apprenticeship recently "out," had laboured in building it. And the weaver was well-to-do, and had a cow, which his "bit lassie"—for he kept a girl to attend to it and him—at early morning, when the well-known horn filled the street with shrieks, delivered over to the bowman's charge, receiving it again at nightfall with the same unearthly noise. Mute is the bowman's horn. He and it are things of the past; but both were useful, nay important in their day. The maid preferred the mason, penniless but "pluckie," to the tall and amiable man of thrums, with his cow and his carefulness. How far the young man and Bella had pledged love to each other, it is needless to inquire. Suffice it, he was her favoured suitor.

In the sunshine of an early October evening, a heap of potatoes, pinky and white-eyed potatoes, lay at the bowman's door; and half-a-dozen girls of different ages were busy, down on their knees, filling baskets at the heap, or eagerly conveying the full baskets into the bowman's cottage. Fairest and most active of them all was

Bella Lumsden; and her young friends were quizzing her in respect of William Mowat.

"Naething lik' guid pittaties for new mairried folk," said one.

"Ye can haud Willie's wame fu' for a towmonth, ony rate, Bell," said a second.

"Since the freet's sae guid, ye'll surely be cried neist Sunday," said another.

And "Here he comes," said they all, as Mowat came along the back street towards the cottage of the bowman. He bore a branch of elder-tree in his hand.

"What's he aifter wi' the wattle!" said one.

"Come an' earn yer supper, lad," said another.

"An' maybe a kiss forbye," slyly said a third.

"I'll tak' the kiss noo, lassie, and wark for it aifter," said Mowat, and he threw down the elder branch, and clasped the last speaker in his arms, and they struggled and tumbled over on the heap of "crops"—the hulms or stems of the potatoes; and the proud Bella Lumsden waxed angry at the sight.

The potatoes were stored and the crops deposited on "the midden," and the helpers had dispersed. The sun was down, and the moon, fiery yellow, barred with belts of cloud, was shining in autumnal splendour, and Bella Lumsden and William Mowat were together in its light. She had not asked him to stay when the others departed. She had been sullen and tart to him, but still he had stayed.

"Bella," said he, "I have broucht you this branch

of bourtree. I'm gain to plant it in the corner o' the yaird."

"Ye needna fash yersel'. It's lik' yer love, lad, licht and boss, and nae root."

"It will thrive like my love, if ye dinna pluck it up," said he, and he stuck the stem into the earth.

"I can please masel about my faither's yaird, wi' yer leave maybe," said she. "An' I dinna see that a bourtree in that corner will in any way impriv' it."

"You'll vex me if you don't let it grow, pretty Bell; gude nicht!" said the lad, and he walked away.

"Tak a basket o' the pink taties tae James Bisset," said the bowman to his daughter. "They're no coman."

She obeyed this order; and when going to Bisset's with the basketful, half in wilfulness, half in thoughtlessness, she plucked up the bourtree branch and carried it to Bisset's cottage, and stuck it in the soil, where it is growing now. Jess Cameron (in after years Mrs. Balders) helped her to carry the basket, and recognised the branch as that which Mowat had brought to the bowman's that evening; and meeting Mowat next day, she brought him to the weaver's cottage, and pointed out "the spaik," and Mowat's heart was filled both with bitterness and anger.

How small are the things oft times that affect and colour whole lives. Here were two hearts, both warm and prepared each to cleave to the other, put asunder by this miserable sprig of bourtree, and because Mowat

had frolicked with a little girl on the potato-heap. Next time these two met, said Bella—

"Hoo are ye gettin' on wi' black Bess Leitch? I'm telt ye've fun oot hoo mony bawbees she's got."

"Dinna fash yersel aboot it," said he. "If ye glup the auld weyvar, ye'll no ding me."

And so they parted.

Before Christmas, in waywardness and self-despite, Bella Lumsden married James Bisset, and was dressed in a silk gown, which seemed not too much for the wife of "the gentle weaver." Perhaps, too, love did not altogether guide William Mowat when he took unto himself a wife.

What was it all to her now, as she sat, with the old bitterness blackening both soul and body, rocking herself in the old man's ruinous doorway? Darker many times than the shadow of the tree at midnight was the blackness of her spirit. How often, do you fancy, she had cursed the tree, as it grew up to darken her door? Why had she suffered it to grow? Why not torn it up while yet the roots were young, and her hand could grasp the stem? It is hard to say. Perhaps, at first, the bitterness of memory had in it a little of sweetness. Do not some palates take pleasure in bitter things, and we, not seldom, hug our miseries?

The darkness of her spirit, too, like the tree, was not the growth of a night, nor yet a year. Five-and-twenty years it took growing and spreading its shadows, until now it stood, in gnarled deformity, darkening her

door and life. At first she perceived it not—the shadow reached not to her door or heart; and she knew not that it was bound to grow and overspread her life. The novelty of her silk gown had scarcely passed away, when the little bourtree, a sapling of a year, shed its first leaves. Then came her only child, the weaver's little Bella, like a fresh burst of sunshine on her life. She first felt the shadow and shivered, when, thereafter, at her "kirking," she saw William Mowat lead his bride, Bess Leitch, up the aisle. The shadow, then first felt and recognised, year by year deepened as the weaver's trade fell off, and his asthma developed itself, and his power of working decreased, and the cow died, and means were wanting to purchase another, and the fact was apparent to the village that James Bisset was a poor and a sickly man. All this time the woman's heart was hardening. At first, when she perceived the shadow, she had comforted herself thinking in her heart, "He is not strong; he is old, and my burden can't be for ever"—dimly, hazily thinking of his death—her husband's death—and her freedom. But death came and went around her, and made many weeping widows, or widows who seemed to weep; but she was still the spouse of James Bisset. Meanwhile, Mowat, like the bourtree, had grown and spread prosperously near her door. By the time she had learned to curse the tree, it had grown beyond her grasp and power to uproot it.

Yet, though dourly, she did the work that fell to

her to do. She tended her ailing husband, if not lovingly, yet so that no one could reproach her. If her child did not evolve her tenderness, she had at least as much care and tending as the neighbours gave to their bairns. If the well of the woman's sympathies was built up, there appeared no total lack of the waters that are necessary for the household lives of us all. None but the weaver and his child knew that the water they drank was bitter, even as the water of Marah. For the woman, when webs came not, went out into the fields to labour, and earned bread for both father and child. Had not the shadow deepened on her life and door when she had come to this? But what of her husband? He, poor man, had wondered as much as any one when Bella Lumsden —the high-spirited Bella Lumsden—had consented to be his. No words, save words of love, had he ever addressed to her since they twain had become one flesh; yet a stone-cold wall of separation had grown up between them; and his heart, that would have welled forth love, was ice-bound. Then, when sickness and poverty came upon him, he bore both without a murmur for himself, but with keen soreness for *her* sake—a soreness made acute by his perception that she felt she had wedded poverty with him, while she might have done otherwise. He never spoke, however, of that, while all her hard kindnesses he acknowledged gratefully.

The child grew with much of her mother's beauty and more than her father's gentleness, beloved of him

with a love passing the love of woman; and ere she had grown to understand it, love was all he had to bestow on her. Thus it happened that the little one betimes learned many things which only the children of poverty learn early.

Once on a summer day she was loitering about a cottage which William Mowat was building, a mile distant from the village, gathering a bundle of "spales" to carry home to help her mother's fire, and Mowat seeing her, and ascertaining who she was, perhaps regretfully tracing the mother's lineaments in the face of the child, gave her a shilling. Elated with this rich gift, she hurried home to deliver it to her mother with the spales; and with eager speech she told how Mr. Mowat gave it to her. The mother smote her, and uttered bitter curses on Mowat and all that was his—wildly and passionately cursed them; but necessity makes shillings valuable, and the woman, cursing, retained the coin. Before then, the child had felt that bitterness lay at her mother's heart. Now, with uncomprehending stare, she knew that the bitterness flowed out in angry torrent at the name of Mowat. But, no doubt, on her young mind, both the blow and the bitterness made but a short-lived impression. To this also tended her father's mournful love, for even his "petting" had with it somewhat of a wail; but his love comforted and brightened her young life, whose pleasure and gladness came mainly from it. So it was, that when her mother sternly called her in at nights from

her playmates—"It is bed-time; wash yer feet"—for she used to run about barefooted; and when she obeyed the harsh-toned command, every night unfailingly she climbed to the breast-beam of the loom, to her father's arms and bosom, to say her prayers and to have her hair combed and shaded, and to be kissed and caressed, and blest, too, before she lay down at the foot of her parents' bed. Indeed, in the hard and dull round of the weaver's life, this little girl was the one thing of goodness and brightness and unqualified love that gave colour and warmth to it—that made many harsh things appear as mercies, for which in all humility he offered thanks to God. Thus, with scanty fare and much love from her father, with much of maternal hardness and governance, Bella Bisset grew up a child of beauty, enjoying the life she had come unto; daily climbing into the bourtree at the door, having no thought that the little tree whose stem scarce bore her weight, was connected with the broken hopes and bitter memories of her mother, from which came that harshness which too often threw shadow and gloom on the unreflective mind of the impetuous child.

Meal at thirty shillings a boll! How few of those who read the words comprehend their full import. In the homes of the poor they compel an entire apprehension. The careful "haining" of every spoonful of the treasured meal, the jealous watchfulness of the expenditure of every penny—to many the half rations and pale faces of times of famine—to all a weighting sense of present

exigency. Meal was at thirty shillings a boll in the spring following Bella Bisset's fourteenth birthday, and her mother expressed the necessity there was for Bella to earn her own porridge. The weaver was often for weeks without a web. "Folk dinna pit muckle in claes whan meal's dear;" and eight or nine shillings a-week were his earnings at the best. So out "tae the herding" the lassie went. "Lik' mony a better lass afore her," said her mother, with many a sigh and prayer from the bereaved father, who felt as if the lamp of life had run out of oil, and light and pleasantness had departed. "But we maun pairt some day, dear bairn!" said he, as he kissed her, and they both were weeping.

How painful is such a severance to certain natures, even in the lowest ranks! Bella—little Bella Bisset—felt as if her heart-strings were broken, and she went, pained, and moanful, and with tears, out into the fields and sunshine, following her beasts; and with silent weeping she fell asleep at night, ever mindful in the daytime of her father's love, every hour of separation increasing her love of her mother; of nights, still dreaming of her father. Bodily ailment, too, was added to her inward malady, for the full diet of meal and milk which she now received, coupled, perhaps, with her mental derangement, brought on boils and blains, very painful and irritating. In their rough way, the people with whom she was were kind to her. Having poulticed one bad boil on the back of her neck until it broke, the farmer's wife squeezed it according to rule, and the

young girl fainted—fainted and had a delicious moment, for as the tide of life flowed on again, she fancied she was in her father's arms. Poor child! Is a superior nervous organisation in such circumstances better than a curse?

But time, the great curative of evils, mental or physical, which admit of cure, soothed and softened the life of Bella Bisset, and in the spring of her seventeenth year, she was a bright little maid, with the peculiar beauty of her mother, the arched nose, protuberant chin, and brilliant eye of her mother, and her father's sweetness of expression. She had shifted her service, and was now in the household of Mr. Cameron, tenant at Lyne, and close by Lyne was the shop of Donald Leitch, merchant there, brother of that Bessie Leitch who was the wife of William Mowat. Leitch was a man well-to-do in the world. In early life he had succeeded to a few hundred pounds by the death of an uncle, and had thriftily made the most of it by his shop, in which he sold not only meal, the staple requisite of the district as food, but cloth, ribbons, groceries, and ironmongery, in fact, his shop was a store, from which all the wants of the district were supplied. A hard, skinflint man was Leitch, now verging on his sixtieth year, a widower with several children, of whom Thomas, the eldest, attended to the store.

Thomas Leitch was a red-haired lad of twenty years, blue-eyed, fair-skinned, a good-looking country laddie, but gowky withal, and soft of head and heart. He saw

Bella Bisset, and straightway fell in love with her, and he firmly believed that his love was real. Proximity of residence made opportunity of love-making easy and frequent; and Bella, to whom her father's tenderness had made love very acceptable, readily yielded herself to the lad's proffered affection. Before either knew the importance of the matter which engaged them, and without a thought that the conditions of their lives were widely different, they had vowed, each to the other, unalterable love. It was a summer of intense delight to them. What dreams they had and told of coming times, when Tom should have a shop of his own, and a tidy house, and unshackled right to love, and a little wife to love ever and so dearly. They gave significance and a seal to their visions by kisses unnumbered! It is the old story, played out by lad and lass since the world began.

But true love seldom runs smoothly. Old Donald Leitch observed that his son now regularly left the house after shop-closing and supper, and did not give direct replies to his sister, when interrogated, as to whither he went. Keen-eyed, too, in business, he one evening noticed that a small blue silk shawlet or neckerchief, price half-a-crown, had disappeared, and he was certain it had not been sold that day. When Thomas went out whistling, after supper, the old man followed him, and came upon him in a clump of hazel, down by the burn at Lyne, with his arms around Mrs. Cameron's servant. The missing neckerchief was

round her neck, fastened with a twopenny-halfpenny brooch. And the father was furious, and struck his son, and ordered him home; and the girl he called "jaud" and "thief." But Tom kept his arms round the lassie, and said she was honest and true, and should be his wife, while the words faltered on his tongue, as his father struck him again and again, until with shouts of derision he drove him from the copse. Then old Donald Leitch gripped the girl's arm, and, repeating the name of thief, he tore the shawlet from her neck, and led her away to her mistress. Speechless she went with him.

There was much and grievous ado about this untoward business. Old Leitch gave the girl in charge to her mistress as the seducer of his son, and as having suborned him to rob his father's shop. Mrs. Cameron, too, unhappily took an evil view of the matter, sympathised with her neighbour, both as a parent and a merchant, and resolved to turn the girl off next day, as the most certain way to end the affair. With many hard words she locked her up in the kitchen when the family went to prayers. She "wadna trust her amang decent folk's bairns, e'en tae hear the word o' God," and the lassie, amazed and stupefied, lay down on her truckle-bed, and heard the family psalm sung "ben the hoose" with a strangely pained yet apathetic heart. She would fain have cried. "The cry was in her throat, choking her," but the tears came not; and, at length, wearily, she fell asleep. Her sleep was not for long, however.

At midnight, Donald Leitch came battering at the door. "Thomas has not come home. Is he here?" Of course he was not; and bitter were the reproaches which the old man heaped upon the girl, the cause of his grief, as he esteemed her. In her midnight sorrow it somewhat comforted her, that her lover had thus shown his spirit and sense of the injury done to her and him. But where was he now? Out in the dark by the burnside, perhaps; in evil case somewhere undoubtedly; and she tossed on her narrow bed and wept for him who was thus suffering for her sake. For herself she had no grief, no pity, uttered no moan. By her mistress' orders, next day, she collected her few articles of clothing and quietly awaited the afternoon, when it suited Mrs. Cameron to have the cart yoked to convey them to the village. "I'll return her tae her mither," said Mrs. Cameron; "let God and her mither guide her after that."

It was evening as the cart rumbled into the inn-yard. There they left it, and the girl followed the woman along the long village street, so well known, but which now somehow seemed strange to her, past persons and places which all seemed foreign, to the lane and the door where, as a child, she was wont to play. Mrs. Cameron entered the house, but the girl hung back and went to the stem of the elder-tree, and once more stood in its shadow. The tree was in full flower, and filled the still evening air with fragrance, heavy and bitter. What Mrs. Cameron said the girl heard not, but her mother's voice was loud and angry; and as Mrs. Cameron returned

to the door, the mother followed her, and cursing was in her mouth. "Ma curse on Donald Leitch an' a' his belongin's."

"Na, na, wife," gently interposed Bisset; "curse not at all! The Lord reigneth."

"Gang in, ye dottrell!" cried the furious woman.

"There she's till ye, ony gait, as I got her, for aught I know," said Mrs. Cameron, walking away.

And the mother stood in the doorway, just where she is sitting now, and scowled at her only child, calling her "base limmer" and "strumpet."

"If ye haed a true drap o' ma bluid in ye, ye wad curse Leitch an' a' his. Ye wad spat in their face! Ye'll no com' in here! It's nae place for ye! Oor meal is scant enow wi'oot uphaudin' the lik' o' ye, ye mon'ment o' sorrow!" and she shut to the door.

Poor Bella laid down the bundle of her clothes, and wearily leaned against the tree. What had she done? Was love so sinful a thing as to merit all this? She was crushed and stunned beyond power to think; and crushed and stunned she stood there, she knew not for how long. But it seemed a long, long time, when she was roused from her stupor by the sounds of singing; and she knew again the cracked voices of her parents singing the psalms of her childhood. They had shut her out before God! A terrible pang went through the lassie's heart, and all her body quivered. Then she heard her father's voice in prayer—heard it once more; and at the well-remembered tones she could have gone

down on her knees in the lane beside the tree, as often she had knelt at her father's chair, overshadowed by the figure of her father. Now father and mother had cast her from them. The shadows of evening were closing.

"God guide me, poor wretch!" she cried. "All are turned against me!" and she took up her bundle and fled away.

Three times before worship had James Bisset essayed to go to his child, and as often, imperiously, had his wife ordered him to let her alone.

"Lippen her till me. It'll dae her na ill tae cool a bit in the skin she haeted in."

But when he rose from his knees, the old man was not to be restrained.

"I can haud nae langer frae ma bairn an' her nigh han' me in distress," he said; and he went out to her; but found her not. He went round the end of the cottage, but she was not there. He searched the empty, tumble-down cow-shed behind, but found her not. He went wildly out into the street, staring anxiously through the mirky gloaming, but she was not seen of him; and he came back frantic to his door, crying, "Whaur is she? Whaur is she? Ma bairn, ma bairn!"

Seven years had passed since then, and brought no tidings of the lost one. Was not this another bitter association to engraft on the tree?

And the seven years had been years of suffering. Poor old James! With the loss of his child all joy in

his life was extinguished. He felt, and felt sharply, that it was his unkindness in her "trouble" that had driven her away. His asthma and his cough made more frequent visits, and the periods of their stay were longer. A nervous tremor, almost a palsy, seized his large, thin limbs, and many days of suffering and scanty food lay within the circle of those seven years. No wonder that the old woman, lean and uncleanly, at times let her wretchedness have voice. Thus, once in the house of a neighbour, whose pot, full of boiled potatoes, stood at the hearth, she made free to select one for eating, and the potato she chose was externally mealy and enticing. It proved hollow and unsound of heart. Then the ever-present sense of her fate found utterance.

"Lass!" she said; "whan young as ye, I could wale the country for a husband, an' I did sae, lik' wi' yer pot the noo. An' I choiced fairly tae think o', but disappointment, an' sorrow, an' dool, wus what I gat for ma portion."

No wonder, too, that now she sat in the doorway and rocked herself, full of black, bitter thought. She had crushed within her every expectation of good for herself, every hope that her child might be doing well! Could ought that belonged to her prosper? Nay, all her life had been evil, and that continually, and her heart was hardened. She was without hope. The shadows had indeed fallen heavily on her. And as evening advanced, and the sloping sun-rays ceased to

penetrate the foliage of the tree, she got up off her stool with a shivering, and went in.

"Wife," said James, "I feel ma trouble comin' on me heavy. I canna bide at it;" and he left his loom. "Lord, be merciful!" he added.

"Ye're aye ailin', ailin'," said she, crossly.

Now no ray of hope came to her even at the thought of the old man's death; and the man and woman sat down together beside the smouldering peat on their desolate hearth.

In came Luckie Balders.

"Hoo are ye the nicht, Jemmus?" asked she.

"Hoch, hoastin' awa', aye hoastin'," answered Mrs. Bisset.

"Weel, neighboors," said Luckie, "I hae news for ye. I seed a hawker, tap o' the day, wha cam' throo Elgin toun, an' wha dae ye think he seed? Yer dochtar Bella there, braw an' brave."

"Oor Bella, woman?" said old Bisset, eagerly grasping the woman's arm.

"Yes, yer Bella, weyvar! Taen up tae be mairried wi' her maister, wha haes a public, an' flirtin' awa' wi' a' the lads o' the toon an' roun aboot. She's in a gran' way, she is, says the hawker."

"Thank God! she's amang the leevin'," ejaculated Bisset, piously.

"We're naething the better o' that, nor o' the news o't either," said the woman through her teeth.

CHAPTER II.

How often and how far do many wander from happiness, in purest wilfulness, closing their hearts against the promptings of reason; case-hardening themselves by the compression of natural emotion. We are injured by him we love; but our hearts are soft, and we long to forgive and embrace again the dear one who has sinned against our love and his own, but this prompting is set at nought, and our love made fuel for the flame of resentment. How alien to human nature this teaching, "If thy brother sin against thee, forgive him; I say not unto thee seven times, but seventy times seven." And how difficult it is, when once we have set out on the wrong path, and got accustomed to it, to go back upon it, or even think of doing so. So it was with Bella Bisset. With her heart full of despair, which hardened while it pained her sorely, she had rushed from her father's door—that vague and reckless feeling of despair, which, when sin and shame are its exciting causes, too often seeks death. But the girl had no consciousness of wrong. She had done no wrong. She had been wounded sorely in the house of her parents; and thus it was that her innocence, her filial love, her passion for the boy Leitch, all went to work in the hardening of her heart against the home of her childhood and the parents she loved. Thank God that in our natures such

fires burn themselves out, and that by-and-by we come to listen again to the still small voice which prompts and pleads for the right.

Bella had one pound five shillings in her pocket when she faced the world alone and in pain, that sum being the moiety of her wages which Mrs. Cameron had paid to her. Perhaps if the woman had paid the money to her mother, the girl might have taken her buffeting and submitted tamely. But she had in her much of her mother's waywardness, and was capable of doing that which pained herself, if unhappily it distressed others. So it was that, thus provided and thus instigated, she set her face towards "the low country," to seek work and forgetfulness in distant places. Youth, and the capacity to do a full day's work for a fair day's wage, were in her favour. Her prettiness also, and her cleverness, for she was both pretty and clever, were great recommendations; and thus she had passed from sphere to sphere of life and labour, until now, nearly seven years after that unhappy evening, she was, as Mrs. Balders, on the authority of the pedler, had stated, barmaid of the White Horse Inn in the old town of Elgin, and had been there nigh eighteen months.

"The pretty barmaid," "The belle barmaid," "The white and pink Bell," and twenty other pleasant and flowery names applied to her, indicated the high appreciation of Bella Bisset as a pretty and a pleasant girl in the eyes of the strapping sons of Morayshire, who thronged the White Horse Inn on market-days. Equally

sweet were the names bestowed on her by the young men of the town, and the coachmen and coach-guards, who mustered at the White Horse of evenings, and imbibed its fuming whisky punch or its creamy malt liquors. The White Horse was the second inn of the good town, and its frequenters were consequently second-rate men also; but in that pleasant garden of the north all men are polite, many courteous, so that the general admiration of our Bella was never mixed with rudeness towards her. In truth, her quickness of reply, and a certain lady-like deportment, the natural grace of a fine girl, were her ample protection against unmannerly bearing. And, as happens to girls in such a situation, many gratuities, pence and sixpences and larger coins, found their way to her oft-pressed hand, and were unhesitatingly accepted, ay, and hoarded, for, would you believe it? our gushing Bella had become sordid and worldly, and desirous of adding coin to coin. She had laid by a nice sum, too.

But, if she had thus become sordid and a lover of money, her forgetfulness of her parents could scarcely be accounted for by mistake of head or heart. So judging, however, we should much mistake her. Her heart and thoughts had very soon come right, and now they ever turned back to earlier days, and to the distant village. Indeed, here is one of the great puzzles of humanity, that hearts are tender and true, and are pained, and yearn for objects which the arms *can* reach to and embrace, and yet no loving arm is stretched out, no effort

made to clasp the object longed for. Or the heart is full of messages of love, full to overflowing, and the words falter on the tongue and remain unspoken. It needs the will, prompt and strong, to do or utter, and strong wills are not so common as sound hearts. But never did the busy girl, harassed all day long, uttering the ever ready "Coming, sir," and handing brimming glasses, oppressed by thronging faces, changing and strange, and the turmoil of market or gala day, never did she, weary at night, lie down, without her thoughts wandering back to the home of her childhood. Never did she add a pound-note to her increasing hoard without the wish and hope to share it with her father, whose love still overflowed her with hallowed tenderness, even with the mother, whom association made sacred in her heart and recollection. Often, too, did the throng of faces in tap-room or parlour flit away from under the gaze of the barmaid at the sound of a voice which recalled the tones of her father's voice; and not seldom, after a fit of frivolity and laughter, did she seek solitude and weeping, to wash away her sense of undutiful neglect of her distant home. Why then did she not return to it, not communicate with her parents? The bridge between them had been broken down. Humanity is full of contradictory emotions, and the pressure or enjoyment of the present moment almost always prevails over sentiment from the past.

"Hillo, ho, ho! What's adoin' now? My glaik Bob an' my perty Bell! What the so-row are ye up till, ye twa?"

Such was the exclamation of Mrs. M'Linton, the jolly mistress of the White Horse. She had come into a chamber and found her son and the barmaid alone, and lackadaisical. Bella was for shuffling past her, but the portly old lady set her person in the doorway and prevented her escape.

Then said Bell, "Maister Robert is very foolish."

"Tell me something, lassie, that I dinna ken! I hae reared him, the wild colt, an' ken his folly! What are ye up till noo, ye rascal?"

"Faith, mother," answered Bob, "I'm doing a wise thing. I'm courting Bella Bisset, but she winna hae me. You're just in time to put in a good word for your son."

"Be aff, ye scaimp! Ye mak' love! If ye haed a tythe pairt o' yer faither's pluck, it's na Bell Bisset, nor ony ither Bell wad say ye nay. Be aff till I see about it;" and Bob went out.

The old lady went on coaxingly, "Ye warna gluffed wi' the lik' o' him?"

"Not at all, ma'am; he is always very kind and thochtful."

"That's richt noo; that's jist what ilka gay sooter sud be, ay an' always kind and thochtfu'. Nae doot, ye'll buckle till him, ye'll tak' him surely?"

"I cannot, mistress, I cannot," said the girl with tears in her eyes, for the landlady was speaking very lovingly.

"No tak' my Ro-bert! My ain blythe Robie! *Ye'll* no tak' him! Why, noo, winna ye, Bell?"

"I'm forespoken," said Bell, lowly and slowly.

"Forespoken! Forespoken, lass!" cried the mistress, "Hoo that, an' wha till? An' hoo camna Rob tae ken?"

"It's lang syne an' an auld story, and nane kens it but ane and me."

But little by little the pawky old matron drew from the girl her secret. Seven years before she had loved and plighted her troth to a young man far away, and the love, carefully folded and laid up in her heart, looked as fresh and true now as on that night when she last kissed her lover in the hazel copse at Lyne.

"Oh me! sic fules we are! Loein', loein' on an' on for seven year, an' nar a sicht nor a scrap o' the chiel! Gude guide us! What will lasses be by-and-by? My Bob aside her tae! Why, Bell, be reasonable. I wad hae fourteen sweethearts sin' syne, ane ilka half-year, ony gate! Ye're dementit, lass."

"Na dementit; but bound baith by heart and word."

"An' gif the chiel cam' tae woo ye ne'er again, I wish tae ask ye, are ye tae coop yersel' up in a garret, an' gang till yer grave unmairried? I'm funny tae ken yer mind on a pint like that."

The lassie "didna ken" her mind on that point; but she hoped and trusted that her lover was true, and "If God brings it otherwise till ma sicht, it'll be time enow tae mind it then."

Mrs. M'Linton was wellnigh hysterical. If a stout lady like her were a subject for so trifling a derangement,

I am certain she must have "gone off." As it was, half with the fun of the thing, she laughed till her sides ached, while, on the other hand, she had vexation enough; for she wished her son well married, and entirely approved of his choice of this girl. But the absurd absorption of Bella, in what appeared a mythical attachment, was certainly calculated to diminish the value which the old lady had heretofore set on her. "The dementit bit lass! Her head's as fill o' nonsense as a skep o' bees! She canna see a sensible chance afore her een. It'll vex her yet, nae doot!"

Now, all this was pure sentiment in Bella Bisset; and sentiment is often delusive. The facts were, that Robert M'Linton had made love to her, open and manly love, for full twelve months past; and she knew his merits, and, in her heart, she was flattered by his love and prized it. But she had pledged her affections long ago; and although that old love had died down well nigh into a dead love, utterly starved as it was, still its memory was sacred. There is much in the nature of a genuine woman which makes her feel and say, "I have spoken and will hold to it." Yet, in circumstances like hers, such sentiment is illusory, and its life is only in the wayward womanliness of the woman, not in her living love.

Great was the din and row in the White Horse Inn on the evening of the Hallow Fair. The parlour was crowded, the tap-room was crowded, the whole house was full, for there had been a cattle-show at the

Ladyhill, as well as a market. In the midst of the throng moved the active barmaid, with numerous assistants specially retained, delivering liquors of all sorts to all sorts of people, and receiving coins of all sorts with smiles and pleasant words.

"The rale Cardow," said one, smacking his lips over his whisky; "pure and pleasant as yersel', Miss Bell!"

"Capital stuff!" said another, admiring his pint of stout; "wi' a beautifu' heid lik' yer ain, pretty Bell!"

And for all there were smart and agreeable answers.

"Genelmen!" shouted one stentorian grazier. His name was Cruickshanks, and he was "half-screwed." "Genelmen, fill ya bumpa! Drink health of pret girl, ver' purt girl! Purt Bell of White Ho-orse!"

And in an instant all round were singing out, "Pretty Bell of the White Horse!" and "Hip-hip-hurrah!"

Bella was bowing, and simpering, and smiling, and Bob M'Linton among the farmers was yelling for "One cheer more," when a little girl, one of the assistants, told Bella "she was wanted" in the bar-room.

"What for now?" she asked.

"A commercial gentleman and his wife have come from the Caledonian wanting rooms for the night."

"Bother! That comes of the town being full. They would not come near us if they could help it!"

But Bella went towards the bar, resolving to charge double the ordinary rates for a bedroom. In the bar-room was a showily dressed woman, with such predomi-

nance of white lace and white ribbon in her costume as indicated recent marriage. She held the arm of a smartly-got-up commercial man, with yellow hair and bushy red whiskers.

"Can my wife and I have a room?" asked the man.

There came no reply from the pretty Bella Bisset. She stared hard for a moment, turned death-like pale, staggered out of the room, and, endeavouring to ascend the stairs, fell down in a faint. The commercial man was the Thomas Leitch of her absurd affections. She had been harassed and excited all day, yet her thoughts were of him, and "far away," when the long parlour was ringing at the toast of her beauty;—and here and thus was the cruel end of her delusion.

"Master Robert, Master Robert, ye're wanted. Bella haes faun ill, and ye must see till the lasses an' the liquors. The mistress is wi' Bella, seeing her tae bed."

The portly old landlady had learned the commercial man's name, and that he was a native of Northshire; and knowing that the dream which held Bella Bisset's life was broken, she sympathised and ministered to her.

But by-and-by the young woman lay alone in her chamber, not in pain of mind or heart, but in a stupor which numbed her emotions and deadened her sensibility. Hoarsely hollow the din of the revellers came to her from the rooms below, like the moan of a wailing crowd, and she heard it with loathing and disgust. Her pleasant things had all become insipid and sickening. The whole

objects of living, nay, life itself, seemed to her, once again, hopeless and hateful. But slowly, on her bed, her mind crept back to the days and scenes of her girlhood, past those days of early passionate love which she had nourished into part of her being. Was she dreaming? She was again under the bourtree, and her mother was calling her in—"It is time for bed;" and she climbed again to her father's knee and bosom, and found herself weeping for love. Ah! she was really awake and weeping now, and there was but one purpose in her heart. "I will arise and go to my father!" and her heart was full of penitence, for that she, too, had been unmindful of her first love, and had forsaken father and mother, who had given her life and childhood's love and nurturing, and had clung to and cherished this delusion, which had come to her in a few summer nights of girlhood, she scarcely knew how. "I must go back to them! I will arise and return to my father!" was what her heart and voice kept saying; and good old Mrs. M'Linton thought, too, that she should go.

"Rob, my son," said the old lady; "dinna speak a word o' love tae Bell jist noo. She's no fit for it! Dinna joke her for yer life, or yer love rather, man. She's sair hurted wi' that rid-haired chiel! but a week or twa will bring her roond; an' we'll a' cam' stracht by-and-by."

So Robert, like a sensible lad, was entirely kind and no more. In a few days all was arranged for the girl's homeward journey. "Benjie" would see her to Inverness

by his three-horse coach, and "auld Johnnie Stewart" would take her thence by the night-mail. And so, in a sort of dreamy fever, she was set down at Inverwick on a fine frosty November forenoon.

"Twenty miles to Kirktown," Bella Bisset could walk them, and her boxes could follow by the carrier. Thus, nightfall found her near the village, and the crisp light of a November moon guided her steps to the old cottage door. The old bourtree stood in the moonlight, leafless and bare from the early frosts. The cottage door was shut, and there was no light within: and the dilapidation and too evident misery of the place gave the girl great pain. The window was broken, the thatch was mouldered, and in part swept away by winds. She heard once and again the old man's cough—"heu-heu-heu-heuch-heuch"—come from within, and it smote her heart sharply and painfully. She could not go in until she was more composed. So she stepped stealthily from the door to the tree-stem, and stood trying to calm herself, and to forgive herself for all her neglect and sin. What would her grief have been if she knew how sad a day that day had been with her parents? It had been a sad day with them indeed—the darkest of their sad lives. Pinched by cold and hunger, for their little meal cask was empty, the woman had been forced to apply to the Inspector of the Poor. He would give relief, but only on condition that the feu-charter of the poor old cottage should be delivered to him; and with tears the old couple resolved not to

part with that, although feu-duties were for several years unpaid. "I'll no sell ma bairn's birthright for a mess o' pottage," exclaimed old James. "She may yet come back an' need its shelter."

The poor woman was entirely crushed, and full of moans and plaints; while old James, as he supped his gruel, made of a handful of meal, "borrowed" by his wife, said, "Oh, woman! We can still thank the Lord. His mercies in the past were more than we poor sinners deserved!" Then there came a low tapping at the door, and, in a minute, mother and daughter stood face to face.

"What's yer wull, mem?" asked the old woman in the trance, of "the lady," who stood silently at the doorstep—silently, for "a gathering at her throat" choked her speech. "What's yer wull, mem?" again asked the crône.

With a sob, the daughter said, "Mother! I've come back tae see father and you!"

"Mither! faither!" said the old woman bewildered; but James had caught the voice and the words, and had rushed to the door, crying, "Ma bairn! Ma bairn!" and the whole difficulty of the interview was over, as the father clasped the daughter in his arms, and she was weeping on his breast.

He led her into the cheerless, blackened home, lighted only by the moon, and she sat on a stool at his side, and he was restless and ettling to clasp her in his arms again, and to hold her there, while the mother said, "Oor hearth's cauld, an' we're auld an' puir.

There's no a candle in the hoose, nor noucht tae welcome ye. We're low doun in pourtith!"

"I hae money enough and tae spair. God forgie me for no coming tae you lang syne!" and the daughter gave money to the mother, and she went out to procure food and comforts.

We will not linger on the daughter's return, so full of sorrow and of rejoicing. Plenty, so long a stranger to the hearth of the weaver, again came to it, to make life worth living. But, indeed, James Bisset's religious mind had always viewed the facts of the present and the fears of the future all as the acceptable dealings of Providence with him, "the clay in the hands of the Great Potter." The cottage was re-thatched, the window repaired, the room whitewashed, and the home of Bella's childhood looked as bright as in its best days. But more to James Bisset than all the comfort, and plenty, and warmth that now were his, was the fact that it was done for him, and to him, by the child of his love. "Bless, O my soul, the Lord thy God!" he would ejaculate, as he sat by the ruddy ingle, "And, O Lord, bless the dear one thou gavest me tae be the stay o' my auld age!" Was it strange that while the father "took" so lovingly and confidently to his daughter, so long estranged from him, her mother was still distant and shy, and so frequently called her "Mem?"

But there was a movement in the old woman's heart of feelings quite natural in her case, but feelings entirely new to her. This unexpected relief from the iron gripe

of want, this unlooked-for elevation both in her own eyes and those of her neighbours, came to her from the child whom her own hands had driven from her door. Could she accept it without conscious demerit and humility? But better feelings, too, were moving within her; for she could not see this great deliverance, so providentially wrought out for her, without reflecting that, in all probability, it was her own act that had so long caused her to suffer And while she thus felt humbled and shy before her child, she could not keep her eyes off the comely and serene woman who so gently called her "mother," wondering now at her composure and beauty; now, mentally tracing the strong likeness that she bore to her, the mother, ere darkness and distress befell her.

What of Bella's seven years' dream of love? It was wholly gone, no trace of it remaining—gone like a long-continued dream, broken and recognised wholly as a dream, followed, of course, by the stupor of first awaking—a stupor soon shaken off by the activity of life. Christmas came, and Bella had now been at home six weeks; her objects had been mainly accomplished, and she was beginning to think again of the world she had left and of the future, and to scheme for her own maintenance and her parents', for her little hoard of wealth would not suffice for long. She began, too, to have a feeling that her Elgin friends were neglecting her. Why had Mr. Robert M'Linton not written to her? He had not said he would; but his mother had asked for her address, and she had written

to tell that she had got safely home. All this was weighting her on Christmas morning, while she was beating up the egg with milk and whisky—"the auld man's milk," for her father. The cheering and shouts of the village boys on the street, the explosion, from time to time, of their pistols and crackers, came to her with dreamy recollections of her early days. The world was still full of young and free hearts. To many life was still a succession of Christmas knotty matches, the future—devoid of fear or care—a thing longed for. But Bella felt more changed than ever in her life before. No longer to be numbered among the young and thoughtless, recollections of the past and the uncertainty of the future, pressed upon and disturbed her. Meantime, she knew she was in "the path of duty," and felt much peace in that, and in the fact that her parents were in comfort. All these things she thought over and over again, at noon and at night; and with such mingled thoughts and feelings her Christmas was withal a dull day.

Next day she sat at the window patching her father's drawers, and the stitches were all confusedly running into each other before her wavering eyes; for she was still thinking such thoughts as those. "Ho! what's that?" said her father, for the sound was unmistakable—a carriage of some sort had stopped at the end of the house. Immediately two men, well wrapped-up, hastily passed the cottage window, and the foremost was Robert M'Linton of the White Horse Inn.

Why did Bella's heart now leap into her mouth and she feel unable to rise from her chair—she who had so calmly rejected this same Robert M'Linton two months ago? Well, we are strange mortals! At anyrate, there was Robert M'Linton; and there was she, palpitating and agitated, so that any one might have seen it. Briefly he told his tale. Mrs. M'Linton, his mother, had slipped her foot on the stairs and had badly sprained it—Robert was not quite sure but it was broken—and he was come, if possible, to induce "Miss Bisset" to return to the White Horse to superintend and conduct it as heretofore, and to comfort his mother. She must go. She must not deny his mother if it was possible for her to go; and on that he introduced his companion, "Mr. Morrison, the writer from Inverwick, who had business with her father," and with whom M'Linton had shared the hire of a conveyance. What was Mr. Morrison's business? That raised some apprehensions of evil, for "Lawyers' visits are onchancey." But it was soon satisfactorily explained. Old Bisset's brother John, from whom he had not heard for thirty years, had recently died at Glasgow, having long been foreman in a factory there, and James, his sole next of kin, was successor to about £1400 of money. Well, well; why had James suffered want so long? Perhaps the bitter things which he had experienced in the past now made pleasant providences more pleasant and more gratefully accepted.

This unexpected change from poverty to what seemed riches immense affected our various friends differently.

Mrs. Bisset was silent, and her conscience was smiting her for having often, too often, thought and said hard things of her husband, and of her fate, and of God's governance. James, who, in the depths of adversity, was ever tuned to thanksgiving, broke out, "Wherewithal shall I come before the Lord? What shall I render to the Lord for all his gifts? Verily, I am less than the least of all His mercies!"

M'Linton, on the other hand, regarded himself as ill-used. "Sir," said he to Mr. Morrison, "if I had kent your errand, it's not with *you* I'd have come here! No but I'm glad to hear there's money coming to them, but I'd hear it more gladly neist week."

"Robert!" said Bella reprovingly; "is it not well, since I must go wi' ye, that I can go wi' my mind at ease?"

And the "Robert" was spoken so softly, that Bob M'Linton forgot himself and answered, "Richt, Bella, dear! It is a' for the best!"

These events occasioned a revolution in the mind and feelings of Mrs. Bisset, a great change and a happy one. She, who had so often said, "All things are against me," came to see that much of the unhappiness which she had suffered flowed from her own heart, and from the bad, black fancies with which she had so long fed her soul. The cold of adversity had frozen up her better nature. The sunshine of better times now thawed and set it free. The choice of her youth was, after all, far better in a worldly sense, than she looked for when she "waled" James Bisset for a husband, infinitely

better than she deserved. His gentleness and excellence of heart she thoroughly knew. She was wont to despise them as "poorness of spirit." Now she saw that they should have excited in herself corresponding humility and goodness. Thus quickened and softened in her heart, she set herself to tend him and to love him as much as she could; and so it was that when, with returning spring, the bourtree again put forth its leaves, she looked and saw not the dismal shadows which it had cast so long, and which had so oppressed her. The day of right-thinking, which had dawned on her, had dissipated them for ever.

Peace and plenty soothed the remaining years of James Bisset, and have been continued to his widow; for he has been gathered to his fathers, and she still survives. The last time I was at Elgin I put up at the White Horse Inn, and was charmed with the old landlady, and with the comely young matron, her daughter-in-law. The latter discharged the whole duties of mistress of the house, and ministered to the old lady with much tenderness and love. Pretty faces, I thought, may win husbands, but gentle hearts and true natures create and continue that genial affection which makes love a life's real joy, and spreads happiness all around.

THE RED-TILED COTTAGE.

CHAPTER I.

You object to my sketches that they are mostly sad. It may well be so. "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" What has a life of labour and poverty to show, but, chiefly, misery and its sores? I cannot paint for you elegance of deportment, refinement of mind and manner, and happy fortunes, from out the clay-built bothies in which my subjects live and move and have their being. You may turn your eyes away from the realities of life, and let fancy drape the world with beauty and goodness; but will that make the mass of life better or less sad? If the evil things of life are to be remedied, they must be looked in the face; and evil things there are, so many and so difficult of remedy, that the wisest investigator may well think it best to desist and turn away. It is good for man that he is beneficently constituted with so much power of endurance—the happy spirit of "contentment," as some name it—as I think, mere passsive "submissiveness." Does either word denote that quality of the human mind mostly exercised by living? Is life a thing chiefly to be borne as a burden with patience and resignation? Ah! truly, I fear it mainly is. Either

our fathers have eaten sour grapes, or God has willed it; for the children's teeth are set on edge. But blessed, verily, is this same contentment or submissiveness, which, like charity, endureth all things, hopeth all things, is not puffed up.

It comes, too, without observation, as part and pertinent of life itself. The morning of life breaks fresh and dewily, with quickened senses and tendencies to laughter, and we buckle to the work of life exultingly; and gradually, as we labour, we get fixed into the yoke, and life is labour; and we endure it, clinging to it somewhat because of the fragrance enjoyed in the morning, somewhat in the hope that the sunset may be pleasant. What if both the fragrant morning had not been ours, and the hope of dewy or lustrous eve were denied to us? How should we bear it then? Thank God that the great majority of those who live into the heat and burden of the day have had some enjoyment in life's morning, or fancy they have had. But you see what my aim is; I am preparing you for another of my sad sketches from the life. I shall dash at it without further preface.

Out in the July noontide, in the turnip-field at the Bught, a score of women stood in the turnip-drills, "thinning the neeps." In front of them, or, as their own words put it, "over them," stood and watched the new grieve, a bright intelligent lad of twenty-four years, sharp and vigilant, to see that time was not lost in gadding, and that the proper number of the plants was left.

"Haud yer gab, Lexy Bain," he cried; "it's no tae lark ye're i' the furs. Mind what ye're aboot wi' thae weeds."

And Lexy Bain, a tall, slightly-made girl of twenty, blushed under the rebuke, and, deftly bending to her toil, sent the soil and superabundant plants spinning with her dexterously-handled hoe, and shot ahead of the group of women.

"Mair haste the less speed," he cried again; "Lexy Bain'll leave a scanty crop i' that rig, I guess." Was the grieve intent on annoying her? He took her hoe, and angrily went through the exercise. "Daftness ne'er yields guid wark," he says; "ye better gie it up, if ye dinna mean tae attend tae't."

Crimson-red flushed the young girl's face—redder than the hot July sun could burn it. Her large, almond-shaped, dark eyes were suffused, so that her long black eyelashes could not conceal the oozing moisture. She could have flung down the hoe and gone off in open revolt; but, then, submissiveness comes early to the field-worker—her bread depended on her labour.

How came she there, with that lithe and graceful figure, that arched neck, and proud bosom, and dazzling black eyes, more fit for lordly hall than for the toil which pained her, framed more for love than labour? She was born in the ranks of those who toil. Her father was the village blacksmith. He was dead.

I daresay she was more agile than accurate, brighter than her comrades, not better. A finely-moulded instep and delicate wrist bring little advantage to their posses-

sor in the turnip-field. Dull wits and mechanical gray eyes see the sprouts more accurately, and spare the right one more regularly, than the spasmodic efforts of the liveliest field-nymph. So all through that day, and the next day, and onwards, the young grieve growled and fretted at Lexy Bain, until it seemed as if these two were sent into the field each to mar the comfort and peace of the other.

So, again, it was among the potato-drills, when they got an extra "overhaul." Lexy Bain broke "the crops," or, worse still, cut them right away; and the grieve fretted and swore, and almost made up his mind to turn her off the field. The girl blushed, and flushed, and looked such looks of disdainful dislike as pretty girls only can look. Apparently the multitude of her offences could not be accounted for by natural incapacity for such simple work. She must cut the potato-stems of purpose to worry him. He certainly thought so, and was by so much the more provoked. And, more provoking still, she could labour for hours, doing work better than the best of her gang. It was now and again only, in capricious intervals, that the frenzy seized her, and that the stems and nodding-bells, the beauty-bells of the potato-drill, went down by her destructive hoe. How long was he to stand it? Were his employer's crops thus to suffer at the caprice of this wayward woman? Over and over again he was on the point of going to the farmer, Mr. Masson, who was his uncle, and stating the case to him, and obtaining his

consent to dismiss her, for she was one of the half-year's women, and lived in the female bothy. Would to God that in those fretty summer days he had bade her begone!

Out in the corn-rigs in latter August, at six of the morning, the autumn sun is glinting somewhat shyly over the nodding grain-field. The lasses, their sickles stuck in the earth, are kilting their coats, and swathing their heads with white kerchiefs; the men are stripped to their shirt-sleeves, and are tightening their loins with girth or cravat. Out spoke the young grieve, "Kate and Betty, Bell, Doll, and Meg will shear for me; and, Lex, will ye mak' the half-dizen?"

"And, Lex, will ye mak' the half-dizen?" was said so softly, so unlike the tones of him whose right it was to command, that the very accents would have betrayed the man, although the whole field had not known the fact that Lexy Bain had captivated the grieve.

Lexy was standing completing her toilet, with a pin in her lips, so she spoke not, but she gave him a nod of her queenlike head, and a glance of those orbs with the dark fringes; and he flushed as only youth can flush when beauty, displaying all its ankles, smiles kindly on it. So, all day long, he followed her sickle, with his toil-heated pulses beating more confusedly for love of her; and when they rested at noon, he was seated by her side behind the stook; and for whom but her did he fetch the water-pitcher?

And that proud nature of hers took her triumph

half-tenderly, half-disdainfully. The man had not wholly won her heart, so as to make it fevered with the sympathy that beat in his. She would not wholly give it to him. So, when he tugged her linen boddice, or teased her in that rude, rough way, in which such men woo, she gave him saucy words, which half-daunted him, yet set him more aflame, as he gazed on the sun-browned beauty. Ah me! What has life to compare to the emotion of young love, the loves of the young, when life is sustained on oatmeal, and the living body clothed in cottons?

"I loe ye, Lexy! I'll dee unless I win ye!"

"Na frichts o' yer deein'! Daur ye win me, lad? I'm thinkin' no."

"Ye'll pit me mad wi' yer doobtin'! I'm daft in luve o' ye the noo."

"Luve, folk say, is lik' daftness jist. It's easy tae gang mad; it's unco hard tae git ower. Sae I caution ye, ma lad. I'm uncoman feart o' daft folk."

"Winna ye be serious, lassie? I'm nae daft, but I'm reemin' fu' o' luve; and it's hard that ye winna own till't here amang the stacks awa. Ye're aye best till me whan the folk stan' by."

"What guid wad it dae ye? Wad it nae dae ye ill? What wad yer uncle, forby yer faither, say tae yer vows tae the lik' o' me?"

"Confoond baith uncle and faither! I'm fit to judge for masel'. I'm no tae hang on till them a' ma days. I'd no be worth ma saut if I did!"

"But they wad ne'er stan' yer takin' a low lass lik' me? Sae dinna think o' it. It can bring only dool till's baith."

"Ma mither would surely be prood o' yer beauty. I canna live unless ye loe me! It'll a' cam' richt i' the hinner-end."

"I hae ma doots o' it, lad; but ye needna grieve afore time."

"Lat me kiss ye the meantime then, if I'm no tae grieve."

And kiss her he did; but she showed no warmth in return. Fain would she have loved him, but she dared not yet give her nature the rein. She knew the gap between them, and doubted the man's courage to leap it.

Now, the young grieve, Hugh Henderson, was the son of a "merchant" at Inverwick, and, having shown some wildness in his youth, he had been set to the pursuit of agriculture. He had studied veterinary surgery, and had served an apprenticeship in farm-work as a ploughman with his uncle, to whom he now filled the office of grieve. Country "merchants" are, in the general case, neither rich nor high born. Perhaps, on the whole, they are not proud men, but they affect a certain social position, and, generally, their wives are great sticklers for their dignity. Will the lad see the risks he is running of breaking with home and his friends? Will he and this imperious girl together rush recklessly on the thick bosses of society? If so, assuredly they shall dash themselves to pieces.

He followed her into barn and byre, at early morning and at close of day. She must be in his rig in the field-work. He must be at her side in the thrashing-mill. She must load his cart. He must watch her at cow-milking. He helped her burdens, when he could without offence. He bought her presents as often as he went to town, just such little gifts as shewed that she was in his heart while he was absent. He would have bought her gowns and shawls, but she would not have them—would not bind herself by accepting things that implied obligation to the donor. Proudly she told him, "Yer seekin' o' me is na fair. Yer folk are no ma ain kind. The winnin' o' ma breid is i' ma han's, an' I winna, maunna bind them." Yet still he followed her, to the bothy fireside, in her evening visits to the neighbouring farms, to the kirk on Sundays. His soul was bound to her. There was truth, somewhat at least of truth, in his exclamation, "I loe ye, Lexy! I'll dee unless I win ye!"

The rivers meet down by the Bught. It is Hallowe'en and midnight. A glorious moon lights up the earth, and streams in silvery flashes from out the shadows of the birch-trees on the rippled river as it leaves the confluence. On the lichened stones out on the point stands the figure of a woman, erect and stately, come there no doubt to divine the future by wetting her "sark-sleeve" at the meeting of the waters. She is pondering at the water-edge, for her heart is full. It would fain cling to some one, and she dare not commit it. "Will

the Lord gie him to me?" she asked aloud. The voice was drowned in the gurgling of the waters; but instantly came an answer up the stream, shrieking and wailing, as of a soul destroyed. Startled, she fled from the water-brink into the birches, and into the arms of Hugh Henderson.

"Ye're no gluffed, Lexy dear? It's nocht but the hoolets."

"'Deed, I'm gluffed entirely, Hugh," she answered, trembling. "I spake somethin'; did ye hear me? An' yon skreetch cam' lik' an answer frae a ghaist tae me, an' I'm a' trimlin' yet."

"Noo, Lexy dear, 'fore God and the nicht-light, tak' me for yer luver. Ye cam' here tae speir o' God wha he designs for ye. Mak' yer ain fate and fortune wi' luve, and hae me noo."

"Wi' yon fricht and stairt I'm no masel the noo tae spake o' luve or onything. Lat me calm doun awee."

He led her, still trembling, into the copse, and they sat down in the seductive moonlight, and between the gurgling waters, whose drowsy hum soothed them. Presently, under the dreamy influence of the time and place, they were in each other's arms; and she would take him "wi' a' her hairt and soul, if his frien's wad agree." The owlet shrieked again in the still night; she heard it, but heeded not, for her heart went with the words that plighted her to the grieve.

When and how shall he tell his love to his uncle, that cross and dour Mr. Masson? When and how shall

he redeem his promise to break the matter to his parents? Weary and long the nights, and heavy and dull the days are, until this pledge shall be redeemed, although Hugh still followed the lassie as lovingly, nay, more lovingly, than before she owned that her heart was his. "Ma wifie, ma dawtie, ma ain!" Will the son's full love not suffice without his father's countenance? Nay, much and deeply as she loved him, she would not have it so.

Who shall blame the lad, if, his great love notwithstanding, he now shrank from the avowal of it to his relations? He could have gone "through fire and water" for her, have dared every physical evil; but here his intrepidity failed him. What he lacked just now was moral courage to uphold him under loss of family love, the violence of family pride outraged, and the possible sneers of many worldly friends. She knew it, and offered him back his love and his vows. He would not have his freedom. What was life without her? He gave her writings calling her wife, and binding him to her beyond question. What she asked for was simply that before men and before the church, he should call her wife. She was not selfish. She was in no haste for the church, but his hesitation was a cloud of doubt which intercepted the sunshine of her happiness in his love, and kept her sitting oft-times in gloom, yearning till the true light should break upon her.

Do not wonder over much at her anxiety. Women learn early in the field-squad that love may be only

desire; and, instinctively they dread it as such when the lover is of a different social rank. Many of the peasant's rude lays narrate the sad tale of the peasant girl's error in this particular, and more rudely still point the sad moral. Why wonder, then, that the cloud obscured her young day of love, that she found only a broken and perplexed pleasure in his arms or protestations? "What way will I mak' sure that he looes me—*me*—no ma face or ma body?" she asked herself. "If I cud ken he looes me as I ken I loe him, I cud gae tae ma grave contentit?"

Then, when he pressed her to reciprocate his blandishments and his kisses, and blamed her reserve, she would say, "I dinna doot yer luve for me! I hae nae doot o' it. But when the warld an' wailth, an' faither an' mither pit against me, I misdoot the natur' o' man that it canna wi'stan' the onshock o' them a'."

Thus, his love brought her no true happiness, at least no happiness unalloyed; and slowly the winter days lengthened into spring, and the lark renewed his love-note in the young grass-fields where cows lowed to their calves, and still this shadow of doubt clung to her. Shall it ever be dispersed? Oh! that it had abode with her, subduing that wayward, fervid nature of hers, even though doubt had ripened into ascertained mistrust! If it had so happened, then it might still have been well with them both.

He was very tender, as well as very ardent. She was fain, but hesitating. It was only when, in love's de-

lirium, he pressed the lassie with excessive warmth, that she would speak of the doubt that haunted her. The bothy girls all knew his passion and his pledges, and greatly approved of them, and were, after the manner of their rough natures, full of sympathy for the lovers. The horsemen knew it too. The younger men cared not; one applauded the grieve and encouraged him; one elderly man shook his head, he had his doubts about it, he never saw good come of the like. This man gravely whispered to her, "For Gudesake, dinna lippen ower muckle tae him. His life is no but beginnin'. He may hae far tae wander frae the Bucht afore the sun set upon him." She gave him no tart answer; he deserved none, and her reason sided with his speech. Will Hugh never break with the world, and take her and love for his portion? What though the lasses, at his bidding, always, in the bothy at night, called her "Mrs. Henderson?" That but little helped to give the gladness born of love that knows no fear.

Hugh was in earnest. She ought to have seen it and recognised it, and been contented. Then, if she had fenced herself, as the old man advised, she might have been happy while she waited. But longing and lingering for assurance was certainly wearying, lying heavy at her heart through her long working day, chilling the kisses she allowed him, lightening the pressure of her arm upon his shoulder when together they met at night.

And love brought care to Hugh too, care which his

Lexy could not share with him, any more than he could bear her burden of—what shall I call it?—doubt—that sadness which came of the doubting that compassed her true love.

He wanted her for his own, all his own. That was his first care, and he had well-nigh succeeded. Next came weary worldly thinking. What was he to do with her and for her, if she became all his? Surely that was no serious care? Yet much of care was in it. He was not a mere labourer, giving labour in exchange for food and clothing, but the style of man who becomes a large and prosperous farmer, and whose wife is "a lady." Now, how shall he contrive his fate that lovely Lexy shall reign queen of a homestead as well as of his heart? There was his care, his great and urgent difficulty. For he could not reconcile the two things, ardent love instantly pressing, and patient waiting for the few years that were sure to place him in a farm. "Waiting!"—he could not wait. He had never spoken to the girl of "waiting." But while he loved, and anxiously thought of the future, time set to evolve his destiny, perhaps as God willed it.

Mrs. Masson has on her stuff gown this bright April day, she will spend it in inspecting the steading, and in generally rummaging in corners, and in fault-finding. She visited the hen-house, and thought of counting the fowls, and was indignant that they flew not around her at her "Chuck, chuck, chuck!" Only a few came to her, the hungry or the greedy ones, while at the dairy-

woman's feeblest "Teuckie!" not a wing was left aside. Next she visited the byres and the bothies, commenting on their general uncleanness. Indeed, the men's bothy was so bare and untidy and cold, with the beds still as the men left them, that she turned away in disgust, to seek the room where the lasses abode. It was very untidy too, for in spring the women have little time from early morning till after seven at night to devote to tidiness. "Could not these foul clothes be kept elsewhere?" asked Mrs. Masson of the dairy-woman. "It's indecent to have them lying about in every corner. Their very stays too! How can they go about all day without stays?" she asked, as she took up one of these from a bedstead. A pin in it pricked her finger, and caused her to examine it. She found that the pin was used to secure a piece of paper inserted where a bone should be, opposite the left breast. Mrs. Masson thought it must be "a charm against toothache," which she had often heard that people wore thus, or some such thing, and curious to see it, she drew it out, telling the dairy-woman that she might say to the girl it was the mistress did it. Thus the charm ran—

"I, Hugh Henderson, residing at the Bught of Glenaldie, do hereby take you, Alexandrina Bain, to be my lawful wife, and do promise and oblige myself to celebrate our marriage openly as soon as possible. So help me God. (Signed) H. HENDERSON."

There was no mistaking the bold handwriting. It was her nephew Hugh's.

She made no outcry about it. She carried the paper home with her. It troubled her sorely. What should she do?

Hugh came in to dinner at two, and put off his coarse boots in the lobby, and went upstairs to wash his hands. His aunt was waiting for him with that paper in her hand.

"You here, aunt!" and "Look here, Hugh!" was spoken simultaneously. A single glance told him what the paper was. It had burnt itself into his brain while he wrote it. "Well," she asked, "what folly's this?"

He was much unnerved, and his heart was beating wildly. He took a minute to compose himself while silently he washed his hands. Then he said, "I'll be quite frank, aunt; but you must tell me first how you came by the paper." A horrible fear was oppressing him, that Lexy had given the writing to his friends to force on a marriage or a catastrophe; and he was resolved that, if she had done so, he would love her no more. Mrs. Masson told him how she came by it. "Well now, aunt, I love that lass, and I maun wed her."

"You silly boy! you don't know what you're saying. Are you ready to quarrel with father and mother, and all of us, for the sake of a lass from the barn and dung-heaps?"

"I don't see why there should be any quarrel about it, aunt. Surely to marry the prettiest girl in the Strath is no sin."

"Here is the great point, Hugh. She can never be

a sister to your sisters, a daughter to your mother, not even a fitting companion for yourself. To involve such a woman in a false position, and all your friends in discomfort, *is* a sin."

"I canna see it, aunt! This is a girl sweeter and handsomer than any woman I know. But what's the good of talking about that? I love her dearly, aunt, and ye see am bound to her."

"Give her up, Hugh, and I put you down five hundred pounds to help you to the first farm that offers. Give her up, Hugh, do."

"I canna, auntie, I canna; and ye shouldna bid me. You see, she loves me as much as I love her, and I wouldna for ten thousand pounds bring grief to her. I canna, auntie!"

"God help me!" said poor Mrs. Masson, as the dinner-bell rung an extra peal for them. "What on earth shall I do in this difficulty?"

That night Hugh had another interview with his aunt. Her mind was decided. He must give up the girl, otherwise she must acquaint his father and her husband, and let them take such steps as they thought right. She had gone to have a "right look" of the lass, and declared that she was nothing in particular, certainly possessed of nothing to compensate Hugh for the evil she would bring him. And Hugh was equally resolute. His damsel was all beauty, and purity, and goodness. It was not her doing. It was his own earnest seeking. She had over and over again offered him his freedom,

and that writing since he gave it to her; she even made her acceptance of him contingent on the consent of his friends.

There the interview ended, for this last piece of information led Mrs. Masson to fancy that the girl was not devoid of good sense. She would see this Lexy to-morrow, and endeavour to prevail on her at once and absolutely to put an end to the courtship.

Of course Hugh told all these things to the girl of his heart. She did not miss the missive until he told her. Then she chid herself for her carelessness, her gross carelessness, that had precipitated a crisis before Hugh's "ain time." Again she urged him to take his freedom. "It'll be sair on me. I'll lang hae hairt-sickness, but, Hugh, what's that by yer happiness? Pain, at warst, is but passin', while life is lang. Leave me Hugh, an' gang tae yer ain folk. A gude cry will pit me richt."

Was he to be less generous? No, not although now he saw somewhat of the rashness and unwisdom of his loving her. No, he would have her, although poverty and toil, nay death itself, stood in the path along which the union was to lead him. How often had he whispered this into her doubting ear! Now she believed him. She would tarry for him as long as he listed.

Next day Lexy Bain stood in Mrs. Masson's room, brought there by special command. She had gone palpitating, well knowing the reason.

"So my boy Hugh has taken it into his head to fall in love with you. He was always a daft callant;

I am so pleased that you keep him at arm's length. It's very good and womanly of you. But it is so foolish!"

"There's little or noucht in me tae win him, mem."

"You're a good-looking lass enough. But that won't do for the world, you know; and it is so proper of you to say that you will not have him without the consent of his family—very right and proper. Now, I sent for you to see what was best to be done. I have burnt that line, you know."

"What does he say himsel' till't?"

"O, he's raving daft. 'Nobody so beautiful as Lexy Bain,' that is all that is in his head; and that he is pledged to you, and must have you. That's *his* cry and way of it."

"*I* loe him dearly."

"Yes, yes; so do I; but you're a sensible lass, a very sensible lass, from what he tells me of you. It would be the ruin of Hugh, you know."

"What way the rooin o' him, mem?"

"Why, in the first place, his friends would turn their backs on him."

"Lat's unnerstan' ane anither. I loe him dearly, an' no for his frien's, but for himsel' alane—naething but himsel'. I canna tell ye what ye oucht tae dae; a puir thing like me is no for that. But this I ken that I loe him, an' whae'er turns their back on him, if he wants me, I'm a' his, body an' saul o' me."

"The sooner *you're* from the Bught the better, my woman;" and while Mrs. Masson was speaking, in came

Hugh. He put his arms round the girl, and kissed her, while his aunt stared in bewilderment.

"Just see, Aunt Masson, what you're doing," he said. "You send Lexy from the farm, and I go straight away with her to Kirktown. We'll be proclaimed to-morrow, and married next week, although by the law I'm already bound to her. The devil can't prevent it."

"The Lord pity us!" cried the old lady.

"But see, aunt, if you don't make a whaup aboot it, we'll not be rash. We're young, and can wait until I get a fair way of life like my equals. Then, if I please myself, where will be the harm of it. You'll wait for me, Lexy?"

"A hunner years," said the damsel.

What could Mrs. Masson do? For her petted nephew's sake she must temporise. Does good ever come of temporising with evil? I never saw it. Yet where is the evil of such love, ardent, honest, and outspoken?

O! the fulness and sweetness of that love which now filled Lexy Bain to overflowing. Her soul bowed down before the truth of him whom she had doubted. Henceforth his wish was her law, his desire her inspiration. Her life, her all, was his.

Mrs. Masson made no "whaup" about the matter. But somehow her ailing spouse began again to resume his charge of the farm-work, and to find his health improved as the April days lengthened. He declared he

had been coddling himself too much, all along of that nephew of his, and that he must work still more. It would do him good.

How swiftly flew the three weeks to the first of May! Happy nights of ardent, unstinted, undoubting love—days that were brighter than the April sunshine, and, unlike that sunshine, were unchequered by aught like April showers.

But what was this great grief that came on May-day? Hugh's father had procured for him, and sent him an offer of, the office of farm-manager to the Laird of Craigineuk, sixty miles away from the Bught and love. He surely will not have it! He cannot leave her to take it! But will it not give him thirty pounds a-year, and a home and food? Well, well! These two are not utterly destitute of wisdom. He will, by-and-by, bring home his beauty, his love, his all. It will be wisest to part, that sooner they may meet not to part again. So, after one short week of tearful bursts and passionate clingings, of frequent sobs and painful smiles, and vows fervid as earnest, he left her to the dull routine of labour, with heavy heart, aching and alone.

CHAPTER II.

"WILL hairst ne'er gang by?"

What is sadder than the wail of a sad soul against time, complaining of its tardiness, while the hours, with unrelaxing speed, are hurrying to "the dreeing of doom?" "Will the hairst ne'er gang by?" We cry out against the present sickness or weariness, although the speeding hours are all fleeting away before that hour when our loved ones shall be dust, or we, beloved, shall taste the bitterness of death. "Will the hairst ne'er gang by?" was the cry of Lexy Bain.

What was it to her that his frequent letters were loving—that he called her "beloved" and "wife?" Yes, that was much to her, but could anything compensate her for the lack of the loving presence of the living man? Nay, she must toil on sadly, mournfully, always feeling a great hollowness and yearning of heart; sometimes fretful.

Then, when harvest was past, she heard the whispers of the lasses in the bothy, "I'se warran' she luiks a' Mrs. Henderson shud be." "Ay, he didna leave her a' by hersel'."

But he will be true to her—she never for a moment doubted it, faithful and true, her lover, her husband.

Her grief came not of doubting. Her pain was the ever-gnawing craving for his coming back again. And, on the whole, she bore it bravely, longing for the happiness to come; wishing, perhaps, that she could crush out a few months of the present. The past pained her not at all.

The translation of Hugh Henderson from the Bught to distant Craigineuk was not fortuitous, but the deliberate arrangement of his very sensible aunt, Mrs. Masson. She trusted that distance and fresh scenes and occupation would banish the image and love of this poor girl, which for the time was filling him. Her expectation was quite reasonable, if her nephew had been a reasonable man; but he was most unreasonable, and only loved his absent idol more because he was deprived of her. Will he marry her? Most assuredly he shall marry her. You may cease to fear for our heroine regarding that. Well, when shall he marry her? Ah! there lay his perplexity, his sore and sharp perplexity, somewhat aggravated by his engagement at Craigineuk. The old laird, Mr. Craigie of Craigineuk, was a stiff old fellow, with stately sons and statelier daughters. He was constantly insisting that his manager was a young gentleman, and as constantly warning him against a *mésalliance*, always fancying the lad in love with this or that small farmer's daughter, and warning him to beware. Then, too, Hugh was almost destitute of money, and must so remain until term-day. Could he, then, with his miserable fifteen pounds, bring home a wife to

the manager's cottage, and announce with a flourish of trumpets that he and she were spouses long before? Oh, the fates were very cruel to them! Why does not God make rugged places level in the way of true love?

She must cease from labour at Martinmas and seek a home. Where should she, could she, go but to her mother's? So before the term she saw her widowed mother, in her brother's absence, and, bent to the ground with her head buried in her mother's lap, she told it all —yes, all; her love and betrothal, with pride; her condition, with burning blushes and a few tears.

Wearily sighed the old widow when she heard the story, and sadly she spoke—

"Ah! ye trust him, ma puir lassie! It's weel ye can think it, for men are sair deceivers, and the trustfu' aft-times fa'."

"Mither, I ken the man," she answered through her tears. "He'll be shure to me as deth."

"Weel, weel, puir bairn! I trust God wills it. What shall we dae i' the meantime?" Oh, the crushing, sad meantime! She would come to her mother at the term, and the mother would help her to drink the bitterness that was mingled in her cup of love.

And at Martinmas she went painfully "home"—painfully, although half of Hugh's fifteen pounds was in her pocket. But her brother turned her from the door. "The house was his," and he would only see shame and sorrow in her story. He would have no such woman, or

her "brat," to come in there. She might find a shelter where she could, her brother would not have any of her shame.

Slowly she dragged herself away, now first realising her isolation, and the coldness and hardness of the world around. She could scarcely realise it. Was it not all a horrid dream? Her love, her madness, her loneliness, her sorrow, were they all real things? Was her life a reality? Poor thing! Down by the river-bank she sat alone, confusedly thinking of it all, through the weird and chill November afternoon. How easily might not all her troubles and questionings be ended in that quiet cold pool! But at the thought Hugh and love came uppermost. She must live to be happy with him, and to make him happy. He was more to her than life or death. So she sat till the mirky gloaming, till the hooting owlets once again drove her back, with her love and sorrow, from the river to the village.

Hugh wrote her very soothingly, very hopefully. Let her spend the money she had in making herself comfortable, as well as she could. He would come to her at Christmas-time. No human power should keep him from her for a while of love, if he was spared. He could not stay with her. He could not carry her with him. But he would arrange for her as best he could. His loving presence would inspire her with courage and new life to bear her burdens until his time should come.

But at Christmas there was more delay and added

sorrow. Mr. Craigie would have Hugh to go to Edinburgh on business, and Hugh must go; and she must pine, and sicken, and suffer. "O God! will the days never end?"

When Hugh returned to Craigineuk, he knew he was a father. "You can't possibly be spared for another week just now," said Mr. Craigie. Will Hugh stay? No, not though certain death lay before him, much less the loss of his employment. "You may find another manager, if you like," said the true lad; and he is gone —gone to the bed-side of his suffering love, to kiss and to fondle his baby-boy.

He would only dare to stay a week. He was sure he would be received back, and his little salary would keep them nicely. He engaged the red-tiled cottage beyond the village square. As soon as she was well she should remove to it, and her mother would bear her company. How quickly she recovered in his presence! What were all her troubles now that he and baby were here? Silently she rejoiced, with a selfless joy ineffable. When shall it be always thus with her? When shall she be always blessed in his presence? The world and life, even baby, are all so soulless and inane without him. "It must be a year; it may be years," Hugh told her; and in the midst of her great joy, her sunshine, she turned her face to the wall and wept, because the night of his absence must come, and be so sad, and dark, and long. Poor Hugh saw her grieving. Could he stand it? Will he still aim at social rank and big

farms? In that little bed lay his portion, his happiness, his care.

"I will not, cannot pairt from baby and you, Lexy love," he said, slowly and distinctly; and he sat down by the bedside to scheme for the future. This was certain, he would not leave them.

When she understood it, there was a fierce conflict of feeling within her. Her urgent love, her joy in his being with her, in opposition to her desire that her happiness should come in his own way and time. And, when the tumult was stilled, she vehemently opposed his resolution. He must go back to the friends and the ways of life that God gave him. Her happiness would be completed time enough. "The wean, sae lik' his dear Dad, will comfort me. I'm twice as able tae bear the want o' ye noo as afore ye cam'."

For two days they talked of it, with deep anxiety, Hugh planning and laying out his future, and full of dreams of bright times—times of a brightness novel to him, and that his day-dream before had never compassed; for now he was flinging away all his ambition, and his thoughts were of humble happiness in such a cottage as he had rented, with scanty means, but with wife and child. Was he not a dear fellow, a true and good fellow, and deserving of all the love that a woman, or many women, could bestow on him, who could do and dare such acts of arrant folly?

The third day settled the matter. His father came in a carriage to the village, and sought him out by the

bedside of his wife and child, addressing him in words of passionate upbraiding, her in vile words of reproach. Hugh did not lose his temper, but his face was very pale. He told his father that she was his wife, and he humbly asked him to bless his grandchild. *He* bless such wife and child, never!—"harlot and bastard," he called them. He would curse them. Then Hugh firmly led him to the door. So the die was cast. Hugh's thoughts now all centre in his duty to those two poor ones, and how he might get bread for them. From father and mother, and the home of his childhood, he was an outcast and alien. Yet he was not greatly crushed by it. Youth is so very elastic.

His project was to start in business at the village as a veterinary surgeon. He would get married next week, and take up his abode with his dear ones in the red-tiled cottage. After his marriage he would go among the farmers and announce his calling. His skill was pretty well known already from his residence at the Bught. He had a diploma, and might reasonably hope for employment sufficient to give them food and clothing.

So they went to the red-tiled cottage and were married, and showed themselves as man and wife at church among the people, and they were very happy. Hugh got printed circulars intimating that he was to practise his profession, and sent them out to the farmers, and followed them up by calling in person. He called at the Bught too. His aunt would not see him. Mr. Masson told him he had played the fool. Generally, he

was received pleasantly enough, and urged to persevere, and, by-and-by, cases began to drop upon him.

All through this matter of the marriage, Hugh had had a strong sense that he was acting not only rightly, but generously; that, in some sort, he was a hero, gallantly sacrificing himself for his love. Now, when he went abroad, it was strange how little the people made of his heroism, how little they thought of his great sacrifice. No man hailed him as a brave fellow; no woman bent down to acknowledge the truth and constancy of his affection. What was it to them? It was provoking, nay, very irritating, this indifference of his little world to his so lofty deeds. If the world had taken up the quarrel of his father and family, and had turned its righteous back and withheld its hand from the perverse son and naughty man, he could have proudly and contentedly borne it. But that the world should plainly tell him that it cared not who his wife was, or where his home lay, or whether he had made or marred his happiness—that, indeed, was hard to bear.

So a shadow gathered on the young husband's brow, and his wife anxiously watched it, and dimly she guessed the cause. At least, the instincts of a true woman guided her. She took her helpless baby and threw herself and it upon his breast, and told him that he was their all in all; in faltering, broken little words she told it, reaching his open heart, and reminding him that it was in nowise for the world's applause that he had loved them, and that now his best happiness, all his

happiness, must come from them and with them, and not from that callous world. Recognising this great truth, more than half the conquest of his happiness lay in recognising it, he folded her and baby in his arms very tenderly—"His puir things! What was the warld beside them?" Was he not rich in them?

Yet a great deal of alloy was mingled with the fine gold of his riches. He could not conceal the fact from himself, nay, he would have done wrong in not seeing and owning it. Could this poor lass from the straw-yard, even with love's gilding of her, fill up the outline which the lad had sketched for himself of all that his wife should be? It was not possible for her. With her house-work and her baby she must be oft untidy, wounding thereby her husband's heart and pride. So other clouds gathered into the husband's face. True woman still, she guessed what pained him, and soon her house and person, and her baby, were all in humble tidiness and neatness and beauty that poor man could desire. Then, proud of her, he made her train her luxuriant hair in raven ringlets round her snowy, queenly neck; and he renewed his first love, and courted his beauty again, her lover, her husband, her own. Oh, happy, happy days, although their home was only a little cottage, and their table was but poorly set forth! Their loving hearts made light of that.

It was pleasant that he was getting some business. No doubt, it was fatiguing to walk far away into the hills to visit a sick cow, and to trudge back again, in

rain or sleety storm, dearly earning a five-shillings fee; sometimes, when it was a widow's cow, giving his toilsome day for nought. But the loving greeting of that queen of love, with her ringlets and printed wrapper, pure as herself, and the sight of his kicking, lusty baby-boy, made him full amends for all his toil when the day was done. Then, too, as often happens to young doctors, he had some fortunate cases, and his reputation began to grow. And how encouraging it was that the Farmers' Club took him up, and installed him formally as their surgeon, and guaranteed him forty pounds a-year for attendance on their horses and cattle. If his accounts against the members, according to a scale agreed on, should exceed that sum, he would receive the full amount of his earnings. Of that sum he was made sure. He was thus placed above want—he and his loved ones; and how sweet to have achieved it by his unaided merit! He did not know that that gruff old Mr. Masson was the mover of the arrangement, and had privately guaranteed the club against loss.

Thereupon he bought some better dresses for his queen; and with his own hands he painted his cottage-door green, and liberally bestowed white paint on its interior and the window-sashes. He walked to Inverwick, and bought a piece of carpet for his parlour, and his queen sewed it up, and bound it, and laid it down: "It will be sae nice for baby's feetie, when he com's tae walk." Then he planted out with flowers the plot of ground before the cottage, and fenced it round with

wooden paling and a wicket-gate. So great comfort and beauty compassed them in their little cottage, and their hearts were full of peace and love.

Then the beauty and elegance of the horse-doctor's wife began to be spoken of and noised about. Her noble carriage, her beautiful head, her graceful simplicity, all were themes of general admiration. No doubt, the good people exaggerated her beauty, because at first they had wronged her; but now they said they wondered not that a man should play the fool, if playing the fool was necessary to win her. And a few friends were gathered to them in those bright and happy days, and perhaps their hearts were lifted up. No doubt, Hugh was proud of her, and the doubtings that had first beset him when he flung himself with her upon the chances of life, were all gone from him. He wondered now how he had postponed his own happiness, and inflicted sad months of suffering on his dear one, in the foolish fear of facing the world with her. It was so simply done, when it was done; and had brought such happiness withal. So he thought as he trained creepers over the walls of that bower of love, his cottage-home, and trimmed up the little garden, uprooting here a weed, there supporting a feeble flower-stem. Perhaps at his heart there lay a silenced wish that his mother should recognise that he had done rightly, and should receive his wife as her daughter, even as the fairest and best of her daughters. If this good fellow had anything lacking which left the full measure of his happiness incomplete, that was it all.

And in early May, while still his garden gave him only a faint reward of flowers, his little son came to know him, and to crow and clamour to be taken, and jumped about by him. "Was it not jolly?" No amount of walking or riding wearied him so that he could not dandle his bright boy, till the wean fell asleep in the midst of the play.

And the heart of the mother clave very closely and tenderly to the babe's father, with delicate, tender love, so unlike the passionate love of a year ago. It was the same love, yet still not the same. It had grown and ripened into a truer, a nobler, a more tender affection for the tender heart and big soul of the true man, then, as now, her all in all.

Is there any other happiness to compare with this, that comes of humble-heartedness and love? If there is, I know it not, and care not to know it. I do not believe that stately palace, or wealth, or rank, or all combined, could yield the sense of fulness and quiet gladness and security that filled and environed the red-tiled cottage, that true abode of love. So, on through the glad May, the days rolled on into brilliant June, and the garden put forth its crop of beauty and perfume. Their life was all sweetness and fragrance.

There came a bright June morning. They had supped their porridge and had their cup of tea, and Hugh was going to Knockdry to see some ailing beast there. He would certainly be back by two for dinner. His wife stood with baby at the door, that wonderful baby with

his sixth tooth cut that morning, chattering and crowing, and feebly flinging his arms about in the glorious sunlight and balmy air. He kissed her, he kissed his baby, as he passed out. He went along his half-dozen paces of gravelled walk. From the border he plucked a white rosebud, and turned back to his wife in the doorway, and stuck it among her raven ringlets, and again he kissed her. He lingered for a minute at the little gate, then slowly strolled into the street; and she went down to the gate with her baby, her heart going after him in love and admiration. She watched him until he went out of sight, turning into the village square.

And as he went he thought of that young horse of old Ross's, that had smashed his cart and put him to defiance, until "he kent he cud mak' naething o' it." It was a handsome brute, with neat limbs and light head, the very thing for a saddle-horse. Hugh could have it for a five-pound note, and if he broke it and trained it, it must be worth twenty pounds or more. Now that would help his dear ones! And this was so bright a morning, just such a morning as will stir youth and high spirits to fresh enterprises. Hugh will have a look at the beast, perhaps ride it on trial to Knockdry.

He saw old Ross in the Square. "The brute's up by at Kirkstyle. The loun will gie him till ye. He's yers for five pun', an' welcome. But tak' care, he's a thrawn deevil." Hugh went up to Kirkstyle, to the offices there, and found Ross's "loun," and the lad put a riding-bridle on the horse's head, placed the old saddle outside the

stable-door, and led out the horse. "Ane cud ne'er saydle him i' the stall," he said. "I'll lift his fore-fut whiles ye pit on the saydle."

But Hugh told him not to bother. "Haud his head, I'll saydle him easily eneuch." He adjusted the stirrups for his riding, and then threw the saddle lightly over the horse's back, looking, in the strength of his manhood, the more powerful animal of the two. Then he stepped back to adjust the crupper.

"Tak' tent!" roared the lad. "He's gain' tae lat flee!" and the beast savagely drooped its head and flung out. Too late came the cry of warning. Hugh Henderson rolled over, beat down on the miry close, and lay motionless in the sunlight.

Loud shouted the lad for help, as he hurried the brute into the stable, and assistance quickly came. The gathering men spoke to poor Hugh, and raised him. He answered them not, he heard not. His limbs dropped limply down. He was at least insensible. "Rin for Dr. Blake. He's shure nae tae be gane oot yet." And the doctor quickly came. But what could he do? Hugh Henderson was dead! No outward injury, no pool of blood, showed how his life had gone out, yet it was too true, he was no more!

His wife, his widow, must be told; and in the bright noontide, scarcely an hour since in love and pride her eyes had followed him, they carried him back to her lifeless, and laid him down in the bedstead with those snowy curtains. They spoke their words of sympathy,

but one by one they went out, and left her alone with her dead.

Kindly, although rough, women came to her. Stolidly and tearlessly she saw them, perhaps she was not aware of their presence. They assumed the control of this house of death, and set about performing its dread though sacred rites. She interfered not with them. They gave her her husband's watch, which they found in his pocket, still beating and going, although *his* heart had ceased to beat. She held it vaguely in her hand and it dropped upon the floor.

They tried to rouse her, saying he looked so sweet and handsome; but she stirred not. Her baby fretted, and without speaking she suckled it, and it slept, and then she laid it on the bed beside its sire. A woman carried it away, and the mother did not see it. So two sleepless, tearless, days and nights went by, and then they bore him from her. That evening Dr. Blake found her at the newly-made grave, her baby sobbing on the sods, she pressing her aching temples, and moaning "Ma heid, ma heid!" Her poor, bruised, stricken head!

She had brain-fever badly after that, lying long in danger of death. Perhaps it would have been well that she had followed her loved one to the grave, for when health came back, reason, at least memory, came not wholly back. It seems that she forgets all those bright and happy days of wedded love and bliss, and their sad termination, for she always is expecting her lover to come to her, always mournfully longing and

waiting for his coming, with a melancholy, quiet expectation that is sad to behold. Those days of bitterness when he was absent from her, that dreary November and December, must surely have pained her sorely, when thus it is that the feelings then prevailing wipe out the memory of these later months of love. Carefully she trains her ringlets as he loved to see them. She will wear no mourning—only the pretty print frocks he admired. Thus, sadly, without murmur, she is waiting for her love.

She is in need of nothing but this love that can never come to her. Her father-in-law died soon after her husband, and left no settlement, so her baby-son succeeded to some house-property at Inverwick, yielding about a hundred pounds a-year. She is very thin and wasted; and Blake says that her yearnings for the coming of her dear one must wear her out before long.

CONCLUSION.

My village is not in dream-land, nor is it singular in its inhabitants, nor have I selected extraordinary specimens of them. Go to the poorest hearth to which you can have access, learn the story of the poor ones who sit and shiver at it; and you will find that each lowly heart of them has passed through periods of suffering, of change, and of emotion, as picturesque every whit as the "novels" enacted in the mansions of the opulent. Nay, my theory is, that pure and natural love, and pure and natural emotion, are best studied under thatched roofs, and in untutored hearts. Our social conventionalities, and affectation of appearances, make the lives and outward symptoms of feeling of the great and the conspicuous, unreal and illusive.

Come, it is time that I should conclude, and that you were moving off to busier, gayer, and more attractive scenes. Life in a village, however good in its way, is somewhat like Highland scenery, picturesque, but rude, and often "uncomfortable." Cultivated minds have more real pleasure in the grace and polish of a Corinthian column, than in contemplating the rugged and barren peak of Benaldie. Goodbye.


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Government of Maharashtra
on 30 January, 2020

